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BLIND MERCY

GERTRUDE CROCKFORD

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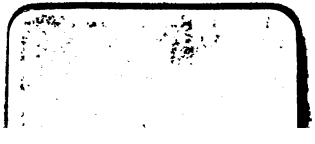

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BLIND MERCY;

AND

Other Tales for the Young.

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'She fancied that it was really one of her sea friends come at last to take her to them, and so she kept still.'—BLIND MERCY, page 47.

(*Frontispiece.*)

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BLIND MERCY;

AND

Other Tales for the Young.

BY

GERTRUDE CROCKFORD.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

EDINBURGH:
WILLIAM P. NIMMO.
1873.

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BLIND MERCY.

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'They gave you the money! I began to think you had run off, money and all.'—BLIND MERCY, page 1.

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BLIND MERCY.

CHAPTER I.

JACK'S TROUBLE.

'WHAT a time you have been, Jack. This corner is not the warmest place you might have chosen. Is that potato-stand your usual attraction? Talk of scissors and knives! My fingers and nose are nearly cut off by the wind. They gave you the money! I began to think you had run off, money and all. Pray, don't blush so, Jack. A little pink might be becoming to your complexion, but lobster-coloured ears, and ditto nose, are——.'

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'Don't chaff so, please, Mr Roland. You know, sir, you did not think anything of the kind. They kept me waiting a long time, for the clerk, at first, did not seem quite satisfied with the cheque. I don't think he would have given me the money, if Mr Dow had not been there, and said he remembered seeing me in the office.'

'Not like the cheque! A beautiful clean one like that. I call them stupids; don't you?'

'Will you take the money, please, sir; one, two, three, five and five are ten sovereigns, and ten shillings in silver.'

'All right, Jack, and you can put the shillings in your own pocket, and don't stare so, please, and oblige me by not saying you have seen me this afternoon. It might disturb my father's happiness; for, strange to say, he has an idea—quite a mistaken one, you see—that I reached the sweet town of Rugby an hour ago. I'm off now.'

'But, please, Mr Roland, if they ask me where I have been all this while, and Mr Dow——.'

'Bother Mr Dow. Just the very reason that I

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did not go to the bank myself, was because I did not want to see old Dow. I was to have gone back with Frank Dow this morning. Can't you romance a little?'

'Do what, sir?'

'Say you were smashed in the Underground; run over by your potato-man, or—well, I haven't time to invent for you. Good-bye.'

'But, sir, stop, Mr Roland; 'I would rather not have all this money. I would, indeed, rather not; please take it—indeed——.'

'Do you see that potato-stand, Jack? Well, if you do not put that money in your pocket directly, instanter, I'll spend it all, every farthing, remember, on potatoes, and make you swallow, skin and all, hot, steaming, fiz-z-zing.' Then, clapping Jack on the shoulder, he did not stop for an answer, but hailed a cab, which stood near, and leaving his companion, open-mouthed, on the curbstone, was out of sight and hearing the next minute.

Mr Roland was a tall, gentlemanly-looking lad of about sixteen years of age. He had a handsome,

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brown, healthy face, and bright, dancing eyes; eyes, in fact, which seemed to say, 'We don't care for anybody or anything.'

His companion, whom he called Jack, was about the same age, though he was, at least, a head shorter, and much slighter in figure. He was pale and puny, and looked neither particularly bright, nor particularly stupid. There was nothing particular about him in any way, and you might meet every day fifty boys like him, during a half-hour's walk in London.

Mr Roland's father was the owner of a great many ships, and he had offices in the city. He was called Captain North, for he had been a sailor in his younger days, whilst, during his last four or five voyages, Jack's father had served with him as seaman. When, however, Captain North grew tired of the sea, and settled down as a landsman, Jack Bunce grew tired of it too, and begging that he might still keep with his old master, employment was found, or rather made for him, in Captain North's office. He and his wife had also the charge of the

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office at night-time, and were allowed to live in the attics, whilst their son Jack was engaged as errand-boy, and to do any odd jobs that could be found for him.

It often chances that we make friends when we least expect it. A thoughtful word, or a kind action, will sometimes win a heart even for life. Now, Captain North had always been free and hearty with his men, never tyrannical, though strict in discipline, and it had happened that, on several occasions, he had been a good friend in time of need to Jack Bunce, and Jack, having a very large *bump* of gratitude, was never tired of giving thanks, nor, I must add, was Captain North ever tired of receiving them.

As Jack was tied to him by gratitude, so the cord at the captain's end was fastened by the love of being thought a benefactor, for most of us, happily, feel our hearts warm to those we have helped.

Captain North was called by some people 'a rough diamond.' Perhaps you do not know, little ones, what is meant when a person is called a

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rough diamond. Let me tell you. As real diamonds, when they are first found, are generally covered with a thick, earthy crust, they only look like dull pieces of glass, the wonderful and radiant light within them, which would dart forth if the jewel were cut and polished, being hidden by the dirt and crust; so it happens with some people, that though they may have kind, honest hearts, their rough manners and speech hide their kindness and goodness in the same way as the dirt hides the stone's sparkle.

Sometimes, however, the world makes a mistake, and stones and men, too, are called 'rough diamonds,' when polishing and testing would prove the former merely hard glass, and the latter but hard men. I am not quite sure whether our Captain would have stood this testing to advantage, and, at the end of my tale, you shall, if you please, tell me what you think.

Well, to reach this end, let us go back to our friend Jack, on the curbstone. Some one giving him a push, and nearly spilling all the shillings into

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the road, reminded him it would be safer to put them into his pocket. Once jingling there, he felt that they were really his, and there was no reason why he should not keep them, as Mr Roland had been so generous. Then came the question, what he should do with them? His young master had joked about hot potatoes, but really it was not an idea only to be joked about. 'Ten shillings' worth of potatoes at a penny-a-piece.' Now Jack was clever enough to find out how many that would be —twelve times ten are 120, and 120 potatoes between four people (counting baby, who had not yet tasted them) would be thirty a piece. Perhaps, that would be too many to take home all at once, so Jack only laid out a shilling with the potato-man, and saved the rest of the money, to be spent with his mother's advice.

It is hardly worth while describing to you the jolly dinner Jack had off these potatoes, for I hope you all know what it is to have a jolly dinner, nor need I tell you the various ways he and his mother proposed spending the other nine shillings. I am

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afraid that I have not time to talk about these pleasant affairs with you, but must, instead, leave them to show you quite a different picture.

It is the next morning, and it is nearly eleven o'clock. The clerks are busy at work in the office, and frequent calls have been made for 'Jack;' but though he has been rung for, and called, he has not answered, nor has he been seen anywhere about. His father, however, has hurried in and out several times, and between whiles he has stood on the stairs, leaning over the bannisters, and looking anxiously up and down the street. At last, after he has asked for the third or fourth time if any one has yet seen Captain North, the Captain is heard coming up the stairs, and Bunce hurries to him at once.

'Mayn't I speak with you a moment first, sir. It wasn't——.'

'Come this way,' said Captain North, and he went forward into his own private room.

Bunce was so deeply engaged thinking of a frightened, tear-faced lad he had left up-stairs, that

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he did not notice how strangely Captain North kept his face turned from him, or how, when he moved to mend the fire, the fire-irons rattled from his hand, or how, when he lifted some letters off the mantel-piece, his hand shook so nervously, that they fluttered into the fender. It was not until the Captain had seated himself (he did so, with his back still turned towards Bunce), that the old seaman was able to begin the explanations he had been in so great a hurry to give.

'I'm a thinking of my boy, sir. I just want to ask you, sir, not to be too hard on either of the youngsters, sir. I don't think Mr Roland meant any wrong. I dare say gents, at his time of life, wants to be flush, and they say at them big schools——.'

'That will do, Bunce. You can leave my son alone; d'ye hear, Bunce? What have you to say about that—that—about your boy? Money was found on him.'

'Aye, sir, and that is just what I wanted to say to you; and if you don't mind, Cap'en, I'll tell you

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how it all happened. My boy never tells me no lies; he doesn't dare. Well, you see, Cap'en North, Jack was a-walking down to Westminster on some errand, or odd job, or sum'mut, and up comes Mr Roland, and touched him on the shoulder. Says he to Jack, 'Here, Jack, just take this cheque into Rowley's, and get it cashed. There's a chap in there I don't want to see.' So Jack, who always does everything Mr Roland tells him, as who wouldn't with them eyes of his; why, he just does as he's bid. Then, says Mr Roland, says he, just keep that silver yourself, and Jack, he says to me, I didn't want to, at first, father, for it didn't seem to me all square. Howsomever, Mr Roland chaffed him, and he kept it. And that's every word true sir,' then he added, pleadingly, 'Cap'en, you've known me many a long voyage, and you don't think now, you can't, sir, that my lad 'ud turn out a thief, aye, and a forger.'

He stopped here, but Captain North only repeated after him, 'Thief,—forger.'

Bunce began speaking again. 'If you'd just write

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to Mr Roland, just ask him, sir, the truth. I don't believe he's a young gem'man who would like to see my Jack take blame through him. It's a terrible thing, Cap'en, for the likes of him.' Bunce was silent for a minute, and then he added,—

'You see, Cap'en, the clerks and the other lads in the office will fight shy of him. He'll never hold a straight head again. I'm sure, Cap'en, I am as sorry as you be to throw the blame on Mr Roland.'

Still no answer from the Captain, and Bunce moved nearer to him.

'There's the silver, please, sir. Jack had laid out a shilling afore you sent for me last night. So Missis and I, we just made it up again—there's ten there now,' and he held them out to his master; then, laying them on the chimney ledge, he moved back a step or two, for, at that moment he had caught sight of his master's face, and though he could hardly tell why, the look on it had startled him. He had thought to see an angry, determined

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face, the face which he and his shipmates had so often dreaded in old times, but which he could have braved easily enough now, knowing himself to be in the right, and instead, he had met a face almost ghastly with the wretchedness marked on it. 'It made me all on a creep,' he said afterwards.

It seemed many minutes before Captain North rose, and at last faced Bunce; and it was Bunce, now, who kept his eyes turned away. Noble hearts always respect grief; and Bunce, who had many noble and soft strings in his heart, felt his master's thoughts should be sacred to him. He might have looked up though, for the face he dreaded had quite recovered its usual fixed, hard look; indeed, I think, it seemed harder than usual.

'I'm very sorry for you, Bunce,' said the Captain, 'very sorry, but the facts are proved, you see; you may believe your lad's story, but I can't, and, what is more, Bunce, I can't keep him longer about the place. Didn't he change this cheque, answer me that? I am behaving very mildly to him, you

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see, for your sake. It's a crime, and he might be transported, if I were a hard master, but I'm not a hard master, and I let him off—providing he takes himself away, because you have been an old and faithful shipmate. I hope you understand that, Bunce. You ask me to question my —— Mr Roland. I telegraphed to him last night, and from what I have heard from him this morning, I believe that—that in fact I—I do right in the course I mean to, I will pursue. If it was not known everywhere, but Rowley knows it, Dow knows it—then. But as I said, Bunce, I am sorry for you, and to show you how I value your old service, and our being shipmates together, I will do all I can for the boy. There's the ship "Himla," you know, lading now for the West Indies. It will start to-morrow or the next day. You ship Jack in her, and I'll not know anything of it. More than that, you see, Bunce, I don't forget old services, I'll tell the Master to wink at it too, and to take care of the lad. Let him keep clear for a few years, say, two or three, and then he'll come back and have

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a fresh start, none the worse for this unfortunate, this—.'

Here the Captain stopped; for whilst he was speaking, Bunce had come close up to him, and a light was kindling so fiercely in his eyes, that the Captain was glad to let his own fall.

'You don't believe it, Cap'en. I know you don't believe it. Your trying to screen your own lad behind my poor little 'un up-stairs. You know who done it. You know Mr Roland took it, and writ your name on it, and got my poor Jack to pass it, the mean cowardly sneak. I would'nt ha' thought it of you, Cap'en, but I'll tell you what I'll do. Smuggle my lad off to the Indies! Break his mother's heart, aye, and mine too, for I have one, I s'pose, somewhere about. Jack Bunce, though he had served under your colours for many a year, Cap'en North, he won't do that. No, I'll just call them chaps in the office up, and I'll have my boy here, and that young sneak Mr Roland, begging your pardon, and we'll just set them face to face, and we'll see then who's the thief. Everybody knows

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it, everybody shall know it too. I'll do it, and this very minute, I'll not have my boy's character——.'

And in another minute he would have been as good as his word, for he had opened the door, and talking the while, was beginning to mount the stairs, had not his master hurried to him, and caught his arm, with shaking fingers; clinging to him tightly, as in broken words, he bade him wait.

Well, little ones, so sad a scene now followed, that I begin to wish that I were not obliged to tell you of it. Captain North almost dragged Bunce back into the room; and pushing him into a chair, stood over him, and Bunce, looking up, felt half-frightened at the face which met his. There was no pride in it now, but it was grey with sorrow. It might have been that of a dead man's, if the eyes had not looked so light and fierce. Then, wondering, and full of pity, Bunce listened to the thick husky voice, and little by little understood what his master wanted to tell him—'he knew it was not Jack who had been the thief. Jack was an honest

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good lad. Would to heaven his son were like him —he knew also it was his own son who had taken the cheque. That very morning he had questioned Roland, and Roland had confessed at once to it. Confessed he had wanted money at school, and that his father, in anger, having denied him pocket-money, he had torn the cheque from the book, and himself signed his father's name. He had not thought of the blame falling on Jack, but had merely, as he had said, not wished to chance meeting Mr Dow at the bank.' Here the Captain stopped speaking, and looked at Bunce with eager questioning eyes; then, he went on and told 'how he meant to do good, to be just to Jack, at the same time as screen his own son. It will be nothing to Jack. In a year's time the whole affair will be forgotten, and a sea trip will be the making of him. I had thought of proposing it to you before, Bunce —but, for my boy! Do you know it was in this very bank the boy was to have been a partner. Rowley promised me to take him in, and it would be a chance he may never have again. You said

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the right words just now, Bunce, 'Thief,—forger.' Good heavens, it will curse him for life. If Rowley once knows it, he's marked, ruined. I'd rather see him dead. I'd rather—' and here his voice rose hard and fierce. 'I swear to you, man, that if this thing is known I'll disinherit the lad. I'll never see him again. I'll curse him.'

He left go of Bunce's hand, and walked backwards and forwards in front of him, glancing, as he walked, at his old servant, whose eyes followed him with a look of fear. I think if one of Bunce's equals had owned to a treachery as great as this, the Captain had confessed, Bunce, long before this, would have doubled up his fist and given the man the punishment he merited; but old habits and feelings still held their power over him. It was no very long while since Captain North's least word had been his law. He could not forget that it was Captain North, his old commander, who was speaking to him, and that he himself was only poor Jack Bunce, a common seaman. The very fact of his master, a gentleman, almost kneeling to him, press-

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ing his hand, and praying, with broken voice to him, a rough sailor, made him too amazed to reason. More accustomed to obey than to think for himself, he felt too confused now to think out 'right' or 'wrong' by himself, and he could only sit still and listen, hardly understanding, and seeing no other course than the one shown to him. The Captain knew his advantage; and so it happened, that by the end of an hour, he had threatened and persuaded to such purpose, that Bunce left the room, promising that his son Jack should ship the next morning in the barque spoken of, and promising too, that the lad should still believe that he was thought guilty of theft. As he was closing the door, he was called back a second time, but this was to receive a strict order, that neither he nor Jack were in any way to mention this affair, or to throw the blame on Mr Roland, without leave being first given them by the Captain.

'Make your mind easy, Bunce, it will all come right,' he then said, 'and you are only doing your duty.'

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Bunce touched his fore-lock; but it was late in the afternoon before he could gain courage to explain to his wife and Jack what Captain North's idea of duty was. However, the ship "Himla" sailed two days after, and Jack as her cabin boy.

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CHAPTER II.

MERCY'S SEA FOLKS.

NOW, I want you, my little friends, to do something which I fancy you will think very difficult. I want you to realize what a long time ten years is. I daresay, few or none of you, my readers, can remember ten years ago; and if you cannot, you will not be able, without much trouble, to think of ten years hence. There is one way in which I might help you to fancy the length of all those years, but, I must suppose first that you have a grown-up sister, who goes to balls in a trailing dress, and who has long worn a chignon, or that you have a brother, who has stick-up collars, and whose whiskers are certainly coming, if they are not yet very bushy.

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Well, if you have such a sister or brother, you must remember that ten years ago, one was a little girl in short frocks, who liked dolls and a game of romps, and whose fingers, instead of being able to run races with one another over the pianoforte, always halted when her thumb went under, and when the other liked rumpled collars better than stiff ones, and thought a great deal more of toffee-drops, than of whiskers. If you can fancy your brother and sister, as a nice little boy and girl, then perhaps you may be able to fancy what a great deal may take place in ten years. And now, you promising to help me as much as you can, I will go on with my story.

I mean to take you out of the dusty crowded city, with its narrow streets and high buildings, take you quite away to the open sea, and where your cheeks may be lapped by fresh pure breezes. I mean to take you as far as the north of Wales, and we will stand on the shore there for a few minutes, and watch the passengers get on board a little tug steamer, which is puffing in a tiny harbour there. (I

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do not mean to tell you the name of the country we are in, or of the town, or even of the tug-steamer, for I promised I would not when this tale was told me, so you see, did I tell you, I should break my word.) There were only a few sailors and idlers standing on the wharf, watching the boat, and these did not seem to take much interest in it. They seemed, however, to be all talking of the same thing, and that was about the light-house to which the tug was going. Two men had left this light-house that same morning for their holiday on shore, and now two others, this afternoon, were to be taken to it, in their stead. One of these, a young fair man, was asking an old sailor at his elbow, to point out to him his new home on the waters, but the afternoon was foggy and misty, and even the sharp eyes of the sailor could only see a thin haze in the distance, where might be or not the spot he was looking for.

The tug is ready at last; the two men are called on board, and the little wharf groans and heaves as the steamer leaves its side, whilst the sailors on shore and on board shout out to one another, a

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'good night.' Now the boat is out of ear-shot, and in another minute it will have steamed into the fog, and be out of sight too, if it keeps up the speed it started with, and goes straight to its aim. However quickly it may go, ay, or straightly too, I think if we make up our minds, little ones, we can get there before it.

Let us try; for I would like to see if you can remember an old acquaintance who is there, and we shall be ready, also, to welcome the tug and its passengers on its arrival.

As I hope you will make some little stay with me in this tall grey house, which seems to have grown out of the sea, we will not go over its curious rooms and corners all at once, but you shall find them out for yourselves, by degrees. Let us go now to its very top, to the room for which the whole pile was built. It is called the light-room, and is the home of that bright, flickering star, which sends its rays to cheer and help brave sailors on that broad stretch of unchanging and ever-changing blue water.

When we reach this room we shall not find our-

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selves alone; for busily engaged in cleaning the lamps and rubbing the glasses, is an old white-haired man, and if you look carefully at him, and remember what I told you ten years can do, you will find out that it is our old friend Jack Bunce.

You children, in your innocence and happiness, can hardly understand, the blank, sad heart of the poor man when his son had really left him. He had wished to do right, to be grateful and obedient, and yet now, feelings came to him, and told him that he had been both cowardly and cruel, and these feelings touched him the harder, as he was not able either to make amends, or to confess them. Other troubles too, hurried to him, for his wife, a weak sickly woman, partly through fretting for her boy, and partly through close air and hard work, fell ill with a low fever, and after some months of nursing, the poor woman died, and then Bunce had no one left to him but a tiny wailing, child. It was wonderful to see what a gentle and patient nurse the rough sailor could be, though, at times, he almost longed that this last one, too,

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would be taken from him. The poor child was blind; weak and delicate always, disease had touched her eyelids, and there was little hope, the hospital doctors said, that she would ever see the bright world or kind friends again.

Think, dear little readers, think if you could never again see the smiling face of dear papa, or the little round one of your own in the glass, or your own dimpled fingers, or Jip or pussy, or sunshine and bright flowers.

Partly, perhaps, in the hopes that fresh breezes from over the sea, and pure air, might strengthen his child Mercy, but chiefly, I think, because the lonely attics were worse than a prison to him, Bunce hearing of a vacant post in this light-house, begged Captain North's influence, so that he might be appointed to it; and thus it happened, that Bunce and his daughter came to be in the light-house which you and I are going to visit.

As I said before, the old sailor is busy with his work at the glasses and lanterns. He does not, however, look very happy over it, for every minute

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or two he leaves off, and seems as if he were listening for something or some one. Then he will go to the top of the narrow corkscrew ladder, and leaning over, call to his daughter,—'Mercy, Mercy;' though Mercy does not answer, and he can hear nothing moving down below, but the flapping of the window-shutters as they swing with the wind.

He goes on with his work for a few minutes, talking to himself the while, talking about Mercy 'little plague,' I think he is calling her. Now, again he shouts her name down the stairs, and now he throws his leathers and cloths on the floor, and evidently fearing Mercy is not safe, or is in mischief (which she was very often), he hurries, grumbling and scolding, to see after her.

Mercy had grown a weird, odd little child, as it was only natural that she should, living as she had done, nearly all her life, in that wild, lonely sea-house. For weeks together she would be mild and docile, often sitting with her hands clasped on her lap, quietly talking and singing to herself, or else lying on the floor, near the open windows, 'that

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the angels might peep in at her,' she said, for with her up-turned face light could so touch her eyes. Then suddenly changing, generally as the weather changed, and the sky grew black, and the winds blew loudly and fiercely round her home, she would become wild and unmanageable. She would seem, then, as her father said, 'An imp, a sprite of a child,' and however closely he watched her, she would always find some way to escape him, and get into mischief. Many had been the time when only by a chance, her father or one of his mates, had saved her from some dreadful danger.

She would climb up into the light-room; and once she was found in the little balcony which surrounded it (it was really but a ledge within a low railing), trying to catch the white sea-gulls, which she could hear pecking against the glass,—for you must remember that she was not stone blind, but was able, at times, by forcing up her eyelid, to catch the flicker of things before her,—and the white fluttering of the gulls' wings had tempted her to try and catch them.

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She would like, also, when she could without being seen, to steal from the house on some rocks, which partly surrounded her sea home. On one side of the light-house, there was a small plateau of rock, which had been paled off, and a rough garden made by the men, where they could take their exercise and smoke their pipes. But Mercy had been forbidden this spot by herself; for from this tiny piece of table-land, rocks like steps, but giant steps, sloped down to the sea, and the child, in her wild humours, could not be trusted to keep within the pailings, and not venture on these dangerous ledges.

For some months, however, Mercy had been so quiet and obedient, that her father began to hope that she had outgrown and lost her odd fancies and temper. This change seemed mostly due to a great friendship which had sprung up between her and one of Bunce's comrades, a young lad. Mercy would be always near him, following him about, stroking his hands and touching softly his face; and he would sing to her, and tell her tales of his

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home on shore. He was really the first play-fellow she had ever had, indeed, no one before had ever petted her, or seemed to care to please her, for though her father loved her, as the only thing left him to love, yet he showed, at the same time, that he thought her, what the Scotch call 'uncanny.' She, too, could not see the tender, anxious look with which he often followed her, and she knew him only by a hard hand, sometimes patting her head, which she would crouch from, or pettishly push away, and by a thick loud voice, which often bade her 'keep still, and do like other folks.'

Her grief, therefore, was really deep and heart-felt when she found that her friend meant to leave her, and that she was to stay alone with her father. No tears came, but her face had not a gleam of hope or brightness left in it; she was as sad looking as that little daisy you plucked the other day, held in a minute in your warm fingers, and then threw on the lawn again.

She would not during all that morning, let the lad leave go of her hand; and when he at last was

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obliged to slip from her and follow his mate into the boat, she would have sprung after him, had not her father held her tightly. When she could no longer hear the splashing of the oars, she threw herself on the ground, looking as cold and pale as if she had lost life and feeling, and her father had to lift her, and carry her up the steep stairs into their living-room. Then, came a storm of passion and weeping. She was like a little wild bird beating itself against its cage, pining and raging by turns. For hours her father watched by her, trying all means to soothe and quiet her; but it was not until late in the afternoon that she was again calm and manageable, when, it being time for him to prepare to obey that order written in so many parts of the light-house, '*You will light the lamps every evening at sunset, and you will keep them clear and unsullied until daylight,*' he bade her follow him up the stairs into the light-room.

She obeyed him at once, and it was wonderful how cleverly she climbed the crooked irregular steps, and picked her way to the only seat (an old

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stool) in the room. She did not, however, stay quiet very long, but in her restless way rambled about from side to side, touching the glasses, tilting the oil and water cans, fidgetting her poor old father with so many strange whims, that he at last angrily ordered her to go down the stairs again, and keep in her room until he came for her.

She went, looking pleased to get away from him, and seemed almost comforted as she wandered from one room to another, humming the bits of song she had learnt. About a quarter of an hour had so passed; her father finishing his work all the quicker for being alone, when, suddenly the singing ceased, and then Bunce, as I said before, fearing that quietness was a sign of mischief, called out to her, and having no answer, felt forced to leave his polishing, and see if she were in safety.

The door which led to the little grass-plot on the rocks was shut, but the bolts, usually kept locked, were undone, and Bunce, as he opened the door, felt fearful that Mercy must have unfastened them and gone out. There was no doubt about it;

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the next instant, for there lay just in front of him the red scarf she had worn all the day on her neck. But where could she be now (there were no corners or shrubs to hide her, nothing but the plain piece of flat green before him). Had she merely opened the door and then gone back into the sitting-room?

Bunce fastened the lock, thinking to find her in one of the rooms, when a strange feeling, a something within him, moved him to go on the green and look over the palings.

These palings were not quite at the edge of the green, there being about a foot of level grass and rock beyond them; then there was a fall of perhaps three feet, and below this several large flat rocks, like a flight of steps, and called by the sailors, the giant's stairs. The two topmost of these steps were covered with slimy moss and thin slippery grasses (a carpet, you may fancy, for the giant's feet). Bunce shuddered at the thought of his blind child being there, whilst he remembered with anger, that her friend, the light-house lad, had carried her down, that she might hear the water

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rumble in the caves beneath. As he looked round him, this misty afternoon, rocks, sea, sky, all seemed one sad nameless colour, only far away in the horizon, where the sun was sinking, lay a thin unbroken thread of crimson. Again his eyes searched the rocks, then, he stepped over the palings, calling loudly the while, 'Mercy, child, Mercy,' but the wind blew back the words. Close against the sad drab (shall I call it?) of the rocks beneath him, and lit up by that crimson line in the sky, was something white, something moving, something which Bunce had not noticed before.

'It's a bit of foam,' he said to himself, but the thought of white foam on the rocks need not have made him shiver and feel cold. 'Mercy, Mercy.' The useless words came to him again, for the sea and wind were warring loudly, and even his strong voice could not have been heard at a yard's distance. Bunce knelt and leant over, and his eyes, though blinded by mist, told him that that white moving thing could only be a figure, it was far too restless for foam, far too large for a sea bird, and if it were

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a figure, it could only be Mercy, his blind child. 'Mercy, Mercy.'

No use in wailing, no use in even watching and hoping, and that was all her father could do. Kneeling still on the ledge, he could only follow her slight figure with straining eyes. She was still now, leaning against the wall of rock, feeling with one hand all she could reach round about her, and stroking the wet slippery grass, whilst, as if she were listening attentively, her other hand was to her ear, and her head bent towards the sea. Presently, as she seemed to feel more secure, and to know better the boundaries of the terrible spot, she seated herself carefully on a bit of mossy rock, and then, her face intent as one thinking deeply, and hearing pleasant sounds, she staid still as the rock itself.

Bunce's first impulse was, at all risks, to get to his child and hold her for safety in his arms, but, poor old man, when he tried to balance himself on the platform, so as to drop on the next ledge, as she must have done, he found, with his swimming head and rheumatic limbs, that it was nothing less

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than an impossibility, and could only be death to him. It seemed, then, that he must stand and watch the child's peril; perhaps even watch her stumble and fall from the rocks, or washed away by that black, growling sea; watch, and whatever happened, be able to give no help.

Almost determined to reach her, through any danger, he leant again over the ledge, when a sudden remembrance came to him of a window, like a ship's port-hole, which looked, he felt nearly sure, on to the very ledge Mercy was on. He roused himself quickly, for he thought, even if he could not reach her from the opening, at any rate he could bid her be still until other help could come. Think then, little ones, his horror and grief, when on going back to the door he found that the high wind had blown it too, and as the lock was on the inside, there was no hope of opening it from where he stood, however much he might batter and push.

What a bitter cry the poor father gave as he went again to watch that white still figure. He was not even able to hope. He must wait for his

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new comrades, and the dark might have come by then, or Mercy might try to get over the rocks back again, or perhaps might try to get nearer the sea, and slip—that was too dreadful to think of; was it not? little readers.

So the time passed, and the red thread in the sky was warped across by ugly grey clouds, and twilight was deepening into evening, and, at last, quickly nearing came the white puffs of steam from the tug we saw starting from that tiny harbour not very long ago.

And now, whilst the tug is nearing, and her father is anxiously waiting, suppose we go to Mercy, and try and find out what made her choose such an out of the way spot.

Had you asked her she would have told you, 'I wanted the sea people to talk to me.'

You must know that the light-house friend of her's, a strong, big fellow, had oftener than her father knew, carried Mercy in his arms down the rocks to hear these sea people. He was a clever kind of lad, and amused himself during the long same-like

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days, in reading tales and poetry, and his favourite tales were about the sea, and about genii and fairies, giants and dragons. These tales, which make you forget your comfortable chair and warm parlour, and take you away to enchanted palaces and magicians' caves. Well, he told Mercy many of these tales; and the two children often used to add to them, or weave new strange ideas, until Mercy, at least, used almost to believe in the tales she told herself.

It was no wonder then, there being no woods or palaces, or even flowers near them, that they found a home for their fancies in that wonderful sea, nor was it very strange that Mercy thought she believed in long-haired mermaids and sea-kings.

In her own mind she had settled as a certain thing, that these poor mermaids of hers had no arms, and that they had long, curly, white hair (this was the foam she had once or twice caught sight of, floating on the top of the waves). Sometimes her sea friends, she said, spoke to her softly, calling her

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'pretty, pretty' (this was when the waves gently tapped the rocks); sometimes they would be angry, but not with her, and they would raise the water and jump high up, nearly out of it, and they would shout and sing noisy songs. It was at these times that they were most friendly with her, for they would often then spring up and kiss her forehead and cheeks, though quickly as she would stretch out her arms, she could never catch them whilst they were doing so.

To-day, the talking was loud and boisterous, but they were not quarrelling, she said. They were pitying poor Mercy. 'Naughty father,' they cried, 'cruel, cruel, cruel,' and many a kiss they *showered* on her, as she bent her head to listen.

Do you remember, little readers, how you feel when in the midst of a fine game of romps with papa, or a quiet pet with mamma, the door opens and you hear a voice saying, 'Bed-time, please Master Tom, or John, or Miss Kate, or Fanny.' Well, Mercy felt two or three times more indignant than you usually do on such occasions, when, just in the

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midst of her talk, a firm arm held her tightly, and a strange voice whispered, 'Be still, little one, you are quite safe now.'

For perhaps the first minute she fancied that it was really one of her sea friends come at last to take her to them, and so she kept still; but her indignation rose, when the next minute she knew that it was only a man, and a strange man, who had hold of her, and that he was stepping into a boat, where she could hear there were other strange voices. Then it was, I fear, that Mercy screamed, and, though I do not like to tell tales, even kicked.

But it was of no good; and after a very short time she felt the boat jar against the steps, and heard her father's voice, broken now, not either harsh or loud, but with tears in it (do you understand that?). He was soon holding her tightly to him, and calling the unkind man who had snatched her away from her sea people, 'Brave and good,' saying too, that he would never forget. Mercy felt that *she* never would.

Now, would you not have fancied that when

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Mercy came to know of the danger she had been rescued from, and the danger the brave sailor had himself run, that she would have been, at least, grateful to him. But no, on the contrary, it was a long time before the child would even speak to him, and she would creep away if he came near her, while she would call him, 'the bad man who had taken her away from her kind sea people.

At first it could not have been a very pleasant life for this sailor in his new home, the light-house (he was one of the men left in charge), for neither of his comrades, as they would have said, *chummed* with him. Bunce, to be sure, remembering what he owed, was civil enough, but he could not understand, and so did not like his mate. 'Why were not his hands rough and hard, and why did his sailor's clothes all look new? Why, too, did he not speak thick, instead of talking as sharp as cut glass?' said Bunce, 'He's too much of a gemman to be any good, we wanted a rougher kind of chap here.'

However, Bunce was not able to find much fault with him in the work way, for the new hand

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seemed willing enough to learn what he did not know, whilst there was a good many handy little things which he was even able to teach Bunce. Still there seemed always a difference in some way, between them, and Bunce sometimes found himself saying, 'Sir,' to him, for which he was all the blunter and crosser afterwards.

Certainly it appeared strange on that first day, when after the other sailor had, in his rough way, said, 'Well mate, they call you Jack Bunce, my handle's Joe Teggs,' and shaking hands, they turned to their third comrade. 'My name?—Jack, no, that's yours. Oh, call me Will.'

'Ain't you got no more?' said Joe Teggs, sneeringly, for he had not liked the looks of his mate all day.

'Ah well,—Will West,' answered the other, with a laugh, and he turned and took one of the glasses to watch the returning tug.

However, it seemed that Will West had made up his mind to make friends of his mates, whether they liked it or no; and when any one, be who he

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may, makes up his mind and sticks to it, he is pretty sure of having his own way, especially if he has a winning way, like this young fellow.

His hardest work, he said afterwards, was to please Mercy, though he sang songs to her and made toy boats by the dozen. He did not take much notice of Joe Teggs; but before a fortnight was over, he and the old man Bunce were fast friends, and many were the yarns they would tell one another over their pipes during Teggs' watch in the light-room. However, there was soon something more than all the yarns, which made a firm tie between the two men, and I will tell you now what this was, and how they came to find it out.

One evening, and a very gusty one, as they were together as usual, Mercy being in bed, and Joe Teggs up in the light-room, Will, who had seemed troubled and dull for some days past, did not even light his pipe, but sat silent and thoughtful for so long, that Bunce, missing his usual pleasant chat, could not help noticing it.

'Why, mate, what ails you?' he said. 'Ain't

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the baccy good. You've seemed a bit queer of late. You be getting home-sick, I guess. Come, cheer up lad.'

'Bunce,' answered West, looking up at his comrade. 'It's of no use beating about the bush any longer. You are quite right. I do feel dull, and it's because I have something on my mind which I want to get rid of, though I have not the courage. I have not been quite open with you, Bunce, and I don't like living here with you any longer, without saying what I ought to have said some weeks ago.'

'Why, lad, out with it then. Not open, why you're as straightforward a lad as——.' Bunce stopped short here, for he remembered that he had at first by no means thought Will West straightforward.

'Yes, dear old friend,' said West, getting up and standing by Bunce, 'I will speak out. It's hard, but its only right to tell you. Give me your hand,—just one shake. It concerns one very near, very dear to you.'

'Why lad, you make one hot and cold; out

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with it. It bean't about Mercy, poor Mitie, she's been a bit quieter of late since she took to you, be it Mercy in mischief again?'

'No, oh no!'

Then it don't signify much to me,—there ain't no other who's much to old Bunce,' said the poor man, with a sigh.

'You have—Bunce, have you quite forgotten your son, your boy Jack?'

The old man started up. 'My boy!'

Now, it is perhaps best to tell you here, that it was a long time, yes, it must have been as many as seven years since Bunce had had any news of his son, for neither young Jack or old Jack were very clever with their pens, and both found it hard work, as they said, to twist their strokes into words,—the letters wouldn't join one another, and when they did, ten to one, but a big smudge of ink would drown the tails and dots, and make all the words into black seas.

The lad had written home during his first voyage, and seemed then happy enough, and

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liking his new life better than he had thought to. Then he had written again, after he had had the few blurred scrawled words from home telling of his mother's death, and this letter, dated three years from the time he left England, and having the New Zealand post-mark, told that he had given up the sea, and that he was going to try his luck up the country. He did not care to come home, sent his love to baby, and promised to send for her and his father when he had made his fortune. That was the last letter Bunce had from him, and the old man had not answered it, for though he had often had the paper and ink before him, he could never find any words, which would tell his thoughts, and he could not make out how the letters went, in the long address Jack had sent him, so, after a while the paper got soiled, and the ink dried up, and the letter was still only in Bunce's head, and the old man would sit and think how much he would like to have news from his lad.

You can fancy then, his eager voice, when he cried out,—'My boy! news of my boy!'

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Will West turned his head away, muttering something about—'Not good news.'

'Why didn't you tell me afore, mate? It warn't friendly like to keep it this while. Is my Jack coming home? What about him, quick mate. He isn't a very tall one, I reckon, even now. Go on West,—you've kep it to yourself long enough.'

'He told me to,—I did as he said—I—.'

'Yes, yes, you're a good lad, but Jack—be he homeward bound? Be he good, honest? Oh lad, speak out!'

But Will West still kept his head turned away; he did not seem able to speak out.

'Is he coming home? Did he say he forgave, did he—?'

West went up to the old man, and laid one hand on his.

'He'll never come home,' he said. 'He forgave all, he bade me tell you.'

'Drowned,' cried poor Bunce.

'West shook his head. 'No, no, not drowned,—killed by Maories.'

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'Fighting! Dead!'

West bowed his head.

There was the half-filled pipe on the table before Bunce; he took it up, and with shaking hands, put in more tobacco, and then tried to strike a match. He cannot do it; he lets the pipe drop from his hand. Poor old man, there's no shame in such tears. His head falls on his breast, whilst the big tears well to his eyes. Turn away, one should not look on sorrow like this.

Will West walks up and down the narrow room, and he, too, is brushing away a tear. Presently he stops, standing in front of Bunce, and takes his hand.

'I have much to tell you. Jack sent many a message to you and Mercy. Come, come, old friend.'

Bunce drew his hand away.

'Why didn't you tell me afore? Why didn't you save him? My poor boy, my poor boy. He might ha' been here if it hadn't a been for me.

West laid his hand on the old man's shoulder; Bunce pushed it off impatiently.

'What did you come sneaking here for? Why

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didn't you tell me afore. Perhaps it warn't my boy after all.'

'He asked me to come to try and comfort you, to try and take his place.' West said gently.

'Jack was a friend of your'n?'

'Yes, yes, indeed,' answered West, hardly less moved than the old man. 'I loved Jack. I owed Jack all the love I could give him, I'll tell you why, sometime.'

'Why did he die out there? Why didn't he keep on blue water,—lie under the water. I wouldn't ha' cared then,—killed—shot by a savage, by a what d'ye call 'em? what did he do it for? poor lad, poor lad.'

'He did not care to come to England; you know why, Bunce. And when he heard of his mother's death he made up his mind to stop out there. He was going to make a home for you and Mercy.'

'What made him fight them savages, I say. Why didn't he die with blue water under him.'

'It was to make a home. Government was

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fighting these Maories, and volunteers had a piece of land for fighting, and that was what Jack wanted. It's a fine country, and he was thinking of a home for you and little Mercy.'

'Poor little lad, poor lad,—and you were a-fighting too?'

'Yes, we were in the same troop, he and I. I had heard where he was, and followed him.'

'Followed him?'

Yes, I will tell you why, sometime; trust me now, Bunce. I wanted to know him, to help him, and, old friend, I only helped him to die. He was shot a week after I came across him. He did not die on the skirmish—did not die at once, but we carried him to the camp, and a fever set in, and he died, his head on my knees.' West's voice trembled and sank. Bunce pressed his hand—'Good lad, good lad.' West spoke again.

'Jack had grown a tall handsome fellow. You would have been proud of him, Bunce. You would hardly have known him for the thin delicate looking boy, who—

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'Why mate, how do you know that? He was though?'

West answered quickly. 'You told me; he often used to speak of it too—tell father, he said, that *that* trouble, and my going to sea, made a man of me.'

'Poor lad; my fault—my fault,' Bunce muttered.

'I have some things of his upstairs to give you; a little scrap of money, some clothes and presents, beads and finery for Mercy. There was another message too—(West's voice really trembled) I was to ask you, to tell you, he bade you, wished, as a dying man, for his sake you would forgive that Roland North, forgive that lad's folly and thoughtlessness, forgive for his sake, and—'

'Folly and thoughtlessness! Do you know what he did, young man, lied! and forged! and killed my poor little Jack. Forgive him! I'll tell you what it is, mate, if he'd come within reach of my fist, old man as I am, I'd fell him, I'd——It's of no use, he'll keep out of harm's way, as he did afore;

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but my boy to tell me to forgive him; he's an angel, but I can't do it, Jack, I can't do it. I did forgive the old'un, old Captain North,—not till I heard of his dying though. He never looked the same after that time. He couldn't look me in the face, he hadn't any more that cheery way. He were glad, I know he were, when I asked to come out here; but the young 'un, the cowardly thief—'

He turned round; Will West had opened the little lattice window, and was standing there with the moon's white fingers lying across his face and shoulders. Perhaps they helped to make him look so pained and sad. Presently he turned to Bunce, saying softly—

'Are not you hard on young Roland? Remember he was a spoilt boy, and did not, may not have known of the deception, of the blame being laid on Jack.'

'He did, Sir. He did, mate. He let the lie rest, and its killed my boy, my Jack. Forgive him! no, Jack, don't 'ee ask me, lad. I'd like to come across him. I'd like to—.'

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Here West moved from the window, and coming up to Bunce, took his hand, saying—

'Good night, old friend, good night. I'll give you these things to-morrow. May I go in and give Mercy a kiss?'

'Ay, ay. She's been a crying for you to-night. You've got over her. Good-night, mate.'

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CHAPTER III.

MERCY AT SCHOOL.

'I WANT something to do,' said Mercy, one morning. Willie, tell me a story, or take me down to the sea people. I will be good.'

You see Mercy was quite friendly by this time with that '*bad man*,' Will West; indeed, she followed him about as she had before followed her old playfellow, and she had even confided to her fingers that she liked Will better than any one else. I wish you could have seen her, as she stood there right in front of Will, in that strangely upright position in which blind people so often hold themselves, and with her hands stretched out in front of her, trying to touch her friend. Perhaps you would not have called her

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'pretty,' and I am not sure whether I should, but there was something in her face, which made you long to love her, and long that she would turn and speak to you in that plaintive, pleading voice. She had dark, nearly black hair, and it hung in thick wavy curls over her shoulders, making the delicate sensitive face look even more colourless than it really was, for the wind and the sea-air had not even tinted her pale checks. She would often, when puzzled by some strange sound, hold that little head of her's on one side, like Dicky does, and then sometimes there would be strange movements of those poor scared and seamed eyelids, as if she were trying to open them (those eyelids were the only painful reminders of her blindness). As she stood there now, her face looked happy, and even merry, and, as she said, 'I will be good,' her lips parted with an arch smile.

'I don't think we will go to the sea people to-day,' anwered West, 'we shall find it very cold on those rocks, for the wind sweeps round there sharply. Suppose, Mercy, as you have nothing to do, and I

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have not much, that I teach you that new plait, or show you how to tie a bow by yourself.'

'No, no,' said Mercy, 'I want a tale.'

'Why, you know all my tales as well as I do myself, Mercy. It is you who should tell me one, now.'

'I'll tell you about sea people.'

'I don't care about sea people. I'd rather hear of real people, Mercy.'

'Don't you think they are real, then?' asked Mercy. 'I do, I see them better with my dark eyes than I can father or you. Father, I know, is round, and you are high-up and straight, but I know quite well what my sea people are like.'

'Shall I tell you of land people; about the little girls I know on the land? Little girls who, instead of listening to the sea, play with toys and dolls.'

'Dolls,' said Mercy, contemptuously. 'They're bits of wood, with old flannel tied round them. Father made me a doll. I don't like dolls, I threw mine at father.'

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'That was a very wrong thing to do,' said Will West. 'The dolls, though, I have seen little land girls play with, have pretty faces, with noses and mouths, and long hair like yours. You would like them.'

'Have they eyes? Have all the little land girls eyes?'

'The little girls I knew had, my poor Mercy.'

'What else had they beside dolls and eyes?'

'Aye, many things, flowers, and books, and music. Do you like music, Mercy?'

'Yes, Tom used to play music. He had a bit of wood, with holes in it, and his cheeks went round, and then music came. Sometimes though it squeaked, aye, I hear you laugh; wasn't that music?'

'I dare say, and very pretty too; but I have seen little girls like you who could not see, and yet could make better music than that.'

'They were clever, perhaps, and I am silly—father says.'

'I don't think you are silly, Mercy, and I would

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like to make you clever too. Do you know that some little blind girls can read the Bible to themselves, and stories too, and can work, make stockings and caps, and many pretty things. How would you like to do all those things?'

Mercy thought it would be very nice, and she put her little fingers into Will's hands, and said, 'Teach me.'

'I do not know how myself,' said Will West. 'But how would you like to come with me away from this sea-house, and learn with these little girls?'

'I'll come,' answered Mercy, 'let's go now.'

'Yes, but we must see what father says. He may not like you to leave him.'

'I shan't mind.'

'You do not care about going then.'

'Yes, yes,' cried Mercy, quickly. 'I can go without father liking it. Come.'

For some time past it had seemed to Will West a great pity that little Mercy should grow up so spoilt and neglected, and he had been wishing that

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she could be placed in one of those happy homes for poor blind children, where they are taught to be made busy and useful. He was very glad then, that Mercy liked the idea so much, as she, being willing, he hoped that as it was for the child's good, her father would be only too ready that she should leave him.

Will West had nearly spent two months at the light-house, and would be expected soon to leave again for shore; so as there was no time to be lost if he really meant to try and take Mercy with him, he made up his mind to speak to Bunce about it at once.

'It was all nonsense,' the old man grumbled when he first heard of it. 'What did Mercy want to go on land for? If Jack had not gone on land, the poor lad might have been alive yet. Mercy was happy enough.'

But Mercy was not happy; and though she did not storm in her old fashion, she sulked and cried, and said, 'Will should not go without her.' Then West tried again to persuade the old man; and at

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last he and Mercy had their own way, and it was settled, that when West left the light-house she should go with him, for Bunce, since that evening when he had heard of his son's death, and of his friendship with Will West, had trusted Will entirely, and Will seemed in all ways to try and be a comfort and help to his friend's father. He wanted Bunce to ask for a holiday too, and go with them on shore, if it were even for a few days only (for Bunce would never take his leave like the other men, and had never left the light-house since he had come to it). However, Will's persuasions about this were of no good. Bunce did not see what Will and Mercy wanted to go for. 'Shore wasn't like it used to be in old days, when one came home from a cruise, and had a pocket full of money; he would rather stay where he was, and if they were wise, they would come back soon. Shore isn't a safe place,' and he wrung Will's hand, and bade him take good care of the little one.

A home for blind children had been built through the aid of some good people, in a large

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town, not very far from that sea-port which I was not to tell you the name of, and it was here that Will West took Mercy, and having known something previously of the matron, arranged to leave her, at first, merely on a visit.

I wonder if any of you, my readers, have ever been over an asylum for blind children. If you have not, you should go the first spare day you have in your next holidays,—for though it may be a sad sight, still you will learn how happy people can be under what seems to you a terrible affliction, and you will also learn what wonderful things fingers can do, when left to themselves; how they seem, at the same time, to be both eyes and fingers.

This home for the blind was a large white house, standing in a garden, and Will's ring at the gate was answered by a neat serving maid, who, to Will's question, 'If he could see Miss Wyat, the matron,' put out her hand, and just touching his coat-sleeve, said, 'You are the gentleman Miss Wyat is expecting. Please to follow me,' and led the way into the house, and held the door open, as cleverly

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as if she had a dozen eyes. Then she told them that just now it was the children's play-time, but that in a minute or two the bell would ring for school, when Miss Wyat would be disengaged, and would come to them. And so they waited (Mercy squeezing up closely to Will), and listened to the pleasant sound of children's shouts and laughter, which came to them from some adjoining room. Some one, too, was playing merry tunes on a piano, and presently there was a little stir, and a hush, and then, clear and sweet rose the chorus of many voices, broken now and then by a laugh, or a 'hush, hush,' as one amongst the little band made a false note, or forgot the words.

'It's prettier talking than the sea people's,' whispered Mercy. The song was finished, and the school-bell ringing, the hubbub of voices grew quieter, and a side-door opening, two by two the children passed through the hall into their school-room, whispering together as they felt or heard the presence of strangers.

Mercy asked anxiously, 'They haven't any eyes?

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they are like me?' and Will telling her, with a sigh, that they were all sightless too, her face brightened, though she gave a sigh, as she murmured, 'I'm very glad.'

'And this is the little girl who is come to be made clever,' spoke a woman's soft voice behind them. 'You did not tell me what a bright pretty child she was, Mr ——.'

'Mercy calls me Will,' Will West interrupted.

'I like that man,' whispered Mercy.

'It's a lady, Mercy, not a man. She has seen so few women, Miss Wyat, that you must forgive her if she seems at first quite a wild child of the woods.'

'Of the sea,' put in Mercy.

'Of the sea or woods, I am sure we shall soon be great friends, don't you think so, dear?' replied Miss Wyat, taking Mercy's hand, and kissing her.

'Your face is nice and soft,' was Mercy's answer, as she stroked it with her little brown fingers.

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Miss Wyat then took the brown fingers in hers, and led Mercy and Will into the next room, where, seated at three different tables, and with some large books before them, sat about five-and-twenty girls. Each table was headed by a teacher, who was also blind, and who followed with her fingers the raised characters in her book, as the girls read aloud in turn.

They were now reading the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and they were too interested over the adventures of Christiana to take much notice of the stranger just entering. Miss Wyat seated Mercy near the girl whose turn it was to read, and Mercy's upturned eager face soon showed that she had caught the interest of the story.

. . . . 'At last they thought of knocking again, and knocked more vehemently than they did at first. Then said the Keeper of the gate, Who is there? So the dog left off to bark, and he opened unto them. Then Christiana made low obeisance, and said, Let not our Lord be offended with his handmaidens, for that we have knocked at his

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princely gate. Then said the Keeper, Whence come ye? And what is it that you would have? Christiana answered, We are come from whence Christian did come, and upon the same errand as he; to wit, to be, if it shall please you, graciously admitted by this gate into the way that leads to the Celestial City. And I answer, my Lord, in the next place, that I am Christiana, once the wife of Christian, that now is gotten above. With that the Keeper of the gate did marvel, saying, What! is she become now a pilgrim, that, but a while ago abhorred that life? Then she bowed her head, and said, Yea; and so are these my sweet babes also. Then he took her by the hand and led her in, and said also, "Suffer the little children to come unto me;" and with that he shut up the gate. This done, he called to a trumpeter that was above, over the gate, to entertain Christiana with shouting and sound of trumpet for joy. So he obeyed, and sounded, and filled the air with his melodious notes. Now, all this while poor Mercy did stand without trembling and crying ——.'

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Here our little Mercy, hearing something at last which seemed to concern her, started up, and cried, 'I didn't.'

A shout came from the class, and most of the busy fingers lost their line and their place. Mercy joined in the laugh, though she said gravely, 'You can't know what I did, for you never saw me before.'

Of course this speech of her's only made the laugh longer, and it took some minutes to get the fingers and readers into order again, and it was then that Miss Wyat went up to Mercy, saying, 'You have so quickly made friends with my little pupils, that you will not mind, dear, will you? if I take Mr ——'

'Will,' said Will West.

'—— If I take Will away for a few minutes to show him your new room, and to talk to him quietly about your studies.'

(It was Miss Wyat's rule, never in the smallest matter to deceive her blind pupils. Perfect faith alone, she said, could make these poor blind children have perfect happiness and safety.)

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Mercy moved her arms round hastily, feeling for Will.

'I can't stay here,' she said, in a tearful voice. 'Don't let me stay here with these dark people. You told me you knew little girls who had eyes. I want them. I—I can't stay with these ——.' Mercy did not know what to call them, but the tears rolled down her cheeks. The voices of the children, who had heard her, faltered, and a quick half-smothered sob burst from one of the taller girls, who, unlike the others, had not yet entirely lost the use of her eyes, though she knew, poor creature, that her sight dimmed daily. She had a deep green shade bound across her brow, which partially hid her face, but one could see that the sensitive delicate mouth quivered at Mercy's cruel words. Miss Wyat went up to her, and, kissing her, whispered, that she 'must forgive the little wild sea child;' and then, taking Mercy by the hand, she led her out by an open window into the garden, calling at the same time, 'Flora, Flora.'

'I have a playmate for you,' she said, as a

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bright, golden-haired girl of about six summers ran across the lawn. 'Mercy, this is Flora, and she has big eyes, and I know she will use them for you. She shall give you sweet-scented flowers, and let you feed her dear bunnies and chickens. Take her hand, Flora! will she do for a friend, Mercy?'

Mercy seemed satisfied, though she sidled up to Will, and whispered, 'What kind of eyes has she?'

'Blue, like forget-me-nots'—then he sighed, as he remembered those words had no meaning to Mercy. 'They are clear and honest,' he added, 'and are shining bright with love for you, Mercy.'

The two children took hold of hands, and Flora, who was the matron's niece, and a great favourite with the pupils, soon won Mercy's heart with her gentle ways and her wonderful pets.'

'Come and see my dolls now,' she said, after they had been wandering for nearly an hour about the garden and poultry-yard.

'No, no. I like live things best. I don't like bits of wood. Come to the bunnies.' The two

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children started off again, hand in hand, Flora wondering this time what bits of wood had to do with her wax doll.

Presently the two little folks were called in by Miss Wyat, to say good-bye to Will West. Will had wished to slip away without this good-bye, for he dreaded Mercy's tears, and thought the matron would be able to manage her best alone; but this Miss Wyat would not hear of.

'Mercy must trust me implicitly,' she said, 'if you wish her to be happy here, and it would be a bad beginning were I to deceive her the first day. Now you will see that she will say good-bye happily enough.'

And Miss Wyat was right; for Mercy quickly understood that her new friend was a true friend, and though Will could see that the struggle was hard to keep the tears back, still she did succeed, and the good-bye was kissed quietly, she only saying to Will, in a pitiful voice,

'You do promise to come again to-morrow? You will promise—please promise?' And Will

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promised, and Mercy stayed—if not happily, at any rate contentedly, with her new friends.

And so Mercy's school-life was begun; and she soon proved that she meant to be a very industrious pupil, for as some sighted girls, as the blind children call those who can see, can tell, quicker than others, a straight line from a crooked one, and A from B, through being more attentive, so Mercy's teacher found those sensitive slender fingers particularly apt in learning how to follow the pencil with one hand, as the letters were formed with the other, and how to feel the difference of the raised letters on the board. Then, Mercy was soon able to do long sums, for she was taught how to use a board, with notches in it, marked at regular distances, whilst little pegs were moved up and down in these notches, according to the numbers needed. She learnt also, for play-work, to make wool mats and cushions, and to do them, too, all by herself. Wools of various colours would be given her in separate boxes, and, in a fairy-like way, she would pick out those shades which worked best together,

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and it would be very seldom that you would be able to find a wrong mixture in her patterns. Then, besides, there was music to study, and games to play—chess being the favourite one with Mercy. Two little girls would sit opposite to one another, looking very thoughtful and serious, and you would find that they were playing chess. There was a board for them if they liked, but generally these children played it in their heads, remembering their own and their adversary's moves, and very rarely becoming confused, or forgetting a position.

I wonder if all this seems to you, my sighted friends, as too wonderful to be true. Well, it really is all true, and you can see all these things, and even more, for yourselves, if you take my advice, and during your next holidays spend a few hours in one of these happy homes.

Of course, you can fancy that the being able to do these useful things made Mercy a very different child. Instead of dreaming her days away, she now had something to show for a day's work—a

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new piece of poetry learnt, or a pretty present for one of her playmates—and as nothing makes us happier than the feeling that we are able to make others happy, Mercy could hardly believe that it was really she, herself, who had been the fretful passionate child in the light-house. You must not think, though, that this change came over Mercy all at once, or without any trouble to herself. No, it was as hard work for Mercy as it is for most of us, to be good; like most of us, she would wake up in the morning with the good wish, that she might be patient and kind all day, and then, perhaps even before breakfast, a thoughtless word from one of her playfellows would make the good wish forgotten, and that day, like many others, looked back to with a sore heart.

Then, again, it was a long time before Mercy could get used to having so many playfellows, for, after living alone for so long a time, the constant chatter and noise confused and worried her; and though, after a while, she became more accustomed to companions, I do not think that during all her

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school life, a day was passed without her wandering away from them to some little nook in the garden, or odd corner in the passages of the house, where she could, for an hour at least, dream day-dreams by herself. Once, one of the girls asked her, 'What she did all by herself? whether she went for a good cry every day?'

'I don't cry when I'm alone—it *would* be stupid, it wouldn't give me what I wanted. When I cried at the light-house, I made ever so much noise, and let everybody know—that's the use of crying. (You see Mercy was not perfect yet.) No, I wonder about things I can't see, and I puzzle my feelings out—put them tidy, like Miss Wyat does my wools. When you all get round me, and laugh at baby things, I want to cry then sometimes; or, when you sing those soft, soughing songs. Things puzzle me so. Such a lot of things I can't make out.'

As Mercy grew wiser, and began to understand other people's thoughts better, quite a new feeling, put into her head by West, and fostered by the

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matron, grew bigger and bigger, and came at last to this—that she must, when she grew up, be a comfort to her old father—must be his nurse, and try to make him happy. Now, of course, behind this feeling came another, and not nearly so pleasant a one—that she had not been a comfort, but a little plague and trouble, to this same kind, old father.

Though it was very disagreeable, she could not help remembering many a naughty word, and scowling face she had given, for what, she knew now, must have been loving and thoughtful care for her. She missed, too, more than she owned even to herself, those touches of that hard hand on her curls, and the frettings and scoldings of that rough voice. Many a time tears would start, as she thought of that odd-covered room, the wind whistling round it, and her father sitting lonely and unloved, and often her cheeks would flush, as the thought came, too, that, perhaps, he was glad to be rid of his troublesome blind Mercy.

And Bunce, how was he faring all this time? Did he long for his child and his friend back

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again? Well, he missed his companion of the long evenings very much, and he put his pipe down, and turned into his crib, at least an hour earlier; and he missed Mercy, too, though, I fear, that for the first week or two, it seemed to him a kind of holiday not to be obliged to call out every minute, 'Mercy, Mercy, have a care, child, you'll be down those steps;' 'Mercy, troublesome chit, you'll be out of that window.' Yes, it certainly was quite a relief to him, feeling that the child was in good hands and out of mischief.

After a while, though, when letters came from West, which they did very often—(West had made his home near the Asylum, and often saw Mercy); when, I say, letters came, and told how good the child was, how tall she was growing, and the many clever things she was able to do, her father began to long to see again, the one treasure left him, as he had often called Mercy.

These letters of Will were as great a trouble, as they were a pleasure to Bunce, for it was as much as he could do to make out the words, and he was

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too proud to ask his mates to help him; however, he generally managed to find the sense, and the little remembrances which came with the letters, helped him to understand how Mercy was changing. A photographic likeness, one day, though he could hardly believe that neatly-dressed, modest-looking child was his own Mercy, who had left him in a sailor's jersey, and with a sulky face; another time, a parcel containing a pair of warm knitted mittens, a comforter, or some other thoughtful little gift, with a slip of paper, sending 'Mercy's love,' in Mercy's own sprawling handwriting.

Spring, summer, autumn again, and Mercy had been ten months on land. The last of these months had seemed very long and tedious to her father; he did not care to gossip with his present mates, and so he moped and felt dull, whilst his heart sickened more and more for his child and his boy's friend.

One evening, a misty and cold one, whilst he was standing idly by the palings which skirted the edge of the patch of green, it happened that a sea-

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gull fancied to flutter and peck its white wings just on that rock where Mercy had clambered to nearly a twelvemonth ago. It was strange, too, that this evening was like that one, misty and sad-looking. For a moment the white, fluttering wings startled him, and then they brought to his mind the terror of that night, his little one's danger, and the bravery of the man who had risked his own safety for that of the child's. All these things passed before him again as clearly as a reflection in a glass; he saw even his own despair, when he found that he could neither reach nor aid his child—his joy and gratitude afterwards when he clasped her in his arms; then, the next moment, his pipe had fallen against the palings, and broken into a thousand pieces, as the thought flurried him, by coming into his head so quickly, 'Why should not he go and see Mercy and Will West on land.'

'I'm blessed if I won't,' he said. 'Why shouldn't I, instead of being chained up here like a billy buoy. (You see his ideas were changing.) I dare say one can be happy enough on shore. Will says

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so, and I'd like to have a gossip with the brave lad. He ain't been here this two months, and Mercy hasn't writ too often neither—they're forgettin' the old fellow, but I'll rouse 'em, I'll go.'

Now, it chanced that it was easy for him to act on this sudden wish, for the next day a tug was expected with provisions, and so Bunce was able to send back by it a request for leave. A few days passed, which the old man counted as anxiously as you do for your Christmas holidays, then the leave came, and then, very quickly after that, Bunce found himself, with his bundle of clothes tied up in a blue handkerchief, once more on shore.

We will let Bunce go his journey by himself; let him travel alone on the dusty railway; let him talk to himself on the way, without listening to him; and we will only meet him when he has reached the town inland where stood the Blind Asylum, and where Will West had his home.

'I'll go first to Will's,' he said, 'and get him to come along with me and see my Mercy.' (Poor

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old man, he was beginning to dread that Mercy would not care to see him after all.)

At last, after he had asked, many times, the road to the direction Will had given him in his letters, he found himself a little way out of the town, and before a large, red-brick house, with a carriage-drive up to the entrance.

'I'm on the wrong tack again,' he thought, 'though may-be he's the gentleman's servant, steward, or ——. Well, I'd liefer have my *freedom* in a light-house.'

'Does one Will West put up here?' he asked the servant, who answered his ring at the kitchen-bell.

'Don't know such a name,' answered the girl, pertly.

'Be this Hope House?'

'Hope House, sure enough.'

'Then, my girl, Will West has quarters here; just you see.'

'Mr Stevens,' called out the maid, 'Mr Stevens, here's an old fellow wants some one of the

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name of West—says he lives here—that ain't the name of the gardener's new lad, is it?'

Mr Stevens was butler at Hope House, and was as important a part of it as its master—at least, he thought so. He bustled to the door.

'West, West, no such name; you should ——' then he changed his tone suddenly. 'Though what name did you say?'

'Will West, and I've writ to him, Will West, Hope House, and got a signal back too.'

'Of course, of course; this girl has made a mistake, my good man. We do take letters for one Mr West here. Would you oblige me with your name?'

Jack looked puzzled, as he answered, 'Jack Bunce, at your service, sir.'

'You are a relation, perhaps, of the young lady at the Asylum?'

'If you mean my blind Mercy, I'm just her father.

'My master, that is to say, Mr West, will be glad to see you, Mr Bunce. He was saying only

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this morning, that he must take some recreation and go over to the light-house. Will you step in, Mr Bunce, my —— Mr West, is not at home. I think he walked over to the Asylum—sweet child that of your's, Mr Bunce; if you'll step in, he will not be very long.'

And, with great condescension, Mr Stevens, to the astonishment of the girl, who stood staring, relieved Bunce of his bundle, and led the way, through the kitchen premises, to a little morning-room up-stairs.

'If you will wait here, Mr Bunce, we expect my master shortly,' said Mr Stevens, as he placed a chair and left the room.

'His master! why does that chap talk to me about his master? I don't want him, I want Will. Will's got into a good berth, sure enough; perhaps he's chief steward. I am glad I'm in port at last, for these country lanes is hard work, and no mistake,' Bunce muttered, as, handling the chairs, he sat down on the hardest and strongest-looking one.

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But, tired as he was with his unusual walk, the old man was far too impatient and excited to sit quietly for any time, and he soon moved to the open window, thinking to watch for Will's coming. Hope House, as I said before, was some little distance from the town, and lay cosily in a nest of hills. The window from which Bunce looked faced a valley terraced with trees, and it opened to a wonderfully fair picture this autumn afternoon. One might have fancied that the day, in its pride, had sought to die in royal state, so brilliantly were lofty trees and lowly furze glowing with purple and gold.

A scene so glorious would have impressed most of us, and it is not strange, then, that it struck with awe our tired traveller, who, for so many months, had looked wearily across the cold grey waves; or that, for a moment, it calmed, by its grandeur, all his hopes and doubts. It touched that sacred chord in his heart, which, happily, we all possess, though we listen but idly to its vibration.

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The chord had been touched, had vibrated, and was dead, and if the old man had been asked, as he turned from the window, what he had thought of the sunset, he would have answered, 'Fine day, sir (or madam), to-morrow.'

Some sea-paintings, hanging on the wall, next attracted his notice, and he moved to examine them more closely.

'Why, bless me,' he exclaimed, 'if that isn't the rig of the "Mary-Ann," I sailed in with—with—.' His glance had fallen on a little crayon portrait of the very man whose name he was going to say. 'Captain North—it's him—it's my Captain North's picter.'

Four pictures were hanging in pairs under the larger oil-painting of the 'Mary-Ann.'

'It's the Cap'en—just that look he had before—well—well—and there's a picter, too, of that young Master Roland. My poor boy! Why! there's my boy himself—and Will West.'

How Bunce's face puckered up,—how he screwed his knuckles into his eyes to clear them,

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—how he scratched his head,—and how he bent down with his hands on his knees, and his face close to the portraits, and finally, how he pulled towards him an ottoman which was near, and sat down in front of the portraits, you must try and fancy for yourselves.

'The picter of the "Mary-Ann,"—the picter of my old master, Cap'en North—the picter of that—that Roland,—my boy's picter,—and Will West's picter. If I thought Will had been deceiven' of me—if I thought ——.' But here something happened which saved Bunce the trouble of thinking. He was sitting back to the door, or he might have noticed that the door had opened gently, whilst standing with one hand on the latch was Will West; just behind him, hand in hand, and with listening faces, were a group of Mercy's schoolfellows, and just in front, with the face of one straining to peer through darkness, was Mercy.

'Where is he?' she said, under her breath, to Will.

'A little to the left, by the pictures.'

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Mercy nodded, crept on tip-toe to the place; for a second her fingers hovered over her father's bent figure, then, her arms had clasped him, and the end of that sentence was never said.

It was not until Mercy had raised her head,—not until her father had rubbed his hand across his eyes, and holding Mercy at arm's length, had cried, 'Well, I'm a'most afeard of you, Mercy, you look such a young lady,' that Will West stepped from behind the door into the room. At his voice and step Bunce started up with outstretched hands, but, as he looked, he drew back, though it was his old friend who stood before him.

'You're not Will West,' he cried out, 'you are not Will West, to wear them fine clothes. You're not Will West, to be master of this grand house,' and his voice grew louder, as he pointed to the pictures. 'I know you be he—you be Roland North, and you're no gem'men, I say, Mr North, or you wouldn't ha' deceived an old man like me —your father's friend, for I were that, Mr Roland, afore ——.'

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'Surely, Bunce, and my friend too,' the young man said eagerly. 'Indeed I did not mean you should have been deceived for so long. I thought you would have known me sooner. Indeed, Bunce, I did. It was Jack's wish too, believe me or —.'

'Jack's wish you took the cheque,—Jack's wish to die among them wild men,—to break his mother's heart,' interrupted Bunce roughly.

'Hush, father,' Mercy's soft voice pleaded. 'Hush, dear father, Will—you see, father, I call him Will, not the other name, and you'll try to be friends with him, won't you? He has told me all about it; it was like a tale, only much nicer, for he promised me it was all true. He is so sorry, and loves you so. He is so good and kind to your little blind Mercy. See, I have a letter here that I was to send you to-day, and the story of it all is written by me, your useless, idle child. Then Stevens said you were here, and Will, and I and Bertie, Fanny and the rest, hardly believed it.' Mercy prattled on, happily unconscious of her

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father's sullen face, or Will's heightened colour, 'I love Will, and I know he loves you, for he is often sad when he thinks you are not his friend—and he loved my brother Jack, and, you see, I know the tale quite well—Jack asked him to be your son, and Will thought you would know him at once, and would be friends with him, for Jack's sake, and then he meant to tell you his other name, but you were angry and rough, father, and he feared that you would hate him even more. That's the tale, and it's a true tale, is'nt it, Will? and you're my brother now, you know, you said you were?

'Child,' cried Bunce, in a voice so fierce, that it frightened the colour from Mercy's face. 'He let the blame fall on that poor lad, my Jack, and I was a fool. He didn't say aught about that, I wouldn't have cared if—if he had only said—.'

'Will, Will,' Mercy almost shouted. 'He doesn't know all, he doesn't understand the tale yet. Father, it was not his fault, not Will's fault,

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that Jack was sent away. He didn't know till long after, not till that Captain, your Captain, died. He's told me all about it, you see, father. When he (Will I mean) did know, he went right off and told every one, and lots of the people were dead or did not remember—then he went away, father, out of England, to that foreign place where Jack was, and he found Jack, and you know now, that's all,' and Mercy clapped her hands, and stopped out of breath.

'Is it so, Will,—Mr Roland?' said her father, speaking more gently.

'Indeed, Bunce, I did not know. I had no idea that Jack was suffering through my fault. My father punished me severely, and I thought my punishment was the end of my crime,—for it was a crime,—though committed through mere thoughtlessness. I did not spend a penny of that money. Bunce, my conscience happily touched me as soon as I had left Jack, and I drove back home, and left it with my mother before I started for Rugby. My poor mother, how sad that ten pounds made

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her. She dreaded my father's temper more than I did, graceless young monkey that I must have been. No, Bunce, it was not until three years ago, not till my return from Egypt, that I knew, that through my wicked folly your home's happiness had been ruined, and Jack, my play fellow, exiled. When I did know, the thought of it haunted me, and haunted me till it sent me off after Jack. I meant to have brought him back, and then asked your pardon, but, dear friend, you know my punishment. I was too late. I could only hear his last wishes, and try to follow them. Mercy has helped me. Nothing though can ever take away the thought that, through me, you have lost Jack, lost a son.'

'But, father,' interrupted Mercy, 'he has given you a daughter, has he not? He has made me ever so good, and I mean to be always good now,' and she knelt down in front of her father, and in a pretty fondling way, tried to draw his arms round her. A happy smile brightened her face as she nestled there, for she knew that

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one of those hard hands was grasped in Mr Roland's.

'Bertie is going to cry, Mr Roland. You promised her some grapes, and she says, "you've *fo'dot* them," cried a piping voice from the group at the doorway. "No, we want Mercy," said baby Bertie, "tome here, Mercy."'

My pen is split, my paper at an end, there is only one more drop in the ink bottle, and Mercy's life is not a fifth part told. As you may care to know a little about what she did with the rest of it, I will write with one nib, and use that last drop of ink very carefully.

She did not live happily for ever after. I am afraid few people do out of fairy tales. You see, my little friend Dick wants the wind to blow from the west, and Tom wants an easterly gale, and that tiresome wind will not blow both ways at once. It will be wise then of Dick, if, for Tom's sake, he tries to feel glad when the weather-cock points to the east, and Tom will find his own reward, if, for Dick's enjoyment, he welcomes a westerly breeze. Will

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they not have both an extra chance of contentment? Love one another, little ones, and few days will pass that you have not some one to rejoice with.

But, I fancy, you say, you are wasting your ink, and there will be none left to tell about Mercy and her father.

Old Bunce, for he was growing very old, was easily persuaded to stay on shore. He went back to the light-house, but only for a short time, and then he came to live in a pretty cottage between Hope House and the 'Home.'

Our little friend Mercy kept her word, and was 'very good,'—*gentle* Mercy, her school fellows called her. She was so apt and attentive at her lessons, that she was soon able to help to teach, and for many years she had a class of her own. She lived with her father, passing a few hours daily with her pupils at the 'Home,' and very pleasant to her were the walks to and fro through the sweet scented lanes. She would sometimes have her father for a companion, and sometimes Will (he was oftener

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called Will than Mr Roland), though, she would laughingly tell them, she could go quite as well by herself.

Mr Roland? Mr Roland stayed most of his time at Hope House, and (t'is the last pen full) kept faithfully and nobly that promise made to poor Jack.

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Little Nat.

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LITTLE NAT.

CHAPTER I.

YEARS ago, before you little ones were born, there lived a tiny boy named Nat. He did not, like you, live in a pretty house with flowers in the windows, nor did he, like you, sleep in a nice white bed, or, like you, have a dear little sister to cuddle and love. No, Nat lived in a tall, dark, brown house in St Giles's, and in the same room that he slept there slept also an old Jew, who sold matches in the day-time, and counted his money all night-time: a man and his wife, and their three dirty

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children; and a Irishwoman, who had always a big basket of herrings by her side, and a short pipe in her mouth. Nat and his mother slept in the fourth corner, and they had an old mattress filled with straw, and a ragged blanket to cover themselves with on cold nights. Nat used to play in the streets all day with other children, and his mother used to help an old woman who turned a mangle in a court near. Nat did not have many treats, but he thought himself very happy if the Irishwoman gave him the tail of a herring for supper, or the pedlar gave him an old match-box. Nat used to call the match-box his purse; not that there was any money in it, but there was to be, if Nat ever had any money.

One cold December night, Nat's mother had to take some mangling to a big house in Russell Square. She came home first for her best shawl, and as Nat cried at being left again, she said, 'Come along, child, only don't screech.' So Nat went.

Now poor little Nat, though he was six years

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old, had never been taught anything. He saw nicely dressed people sometimes when he went out with his mother, but he never thought why he was not nicely dressed too. He had never been to Church in his life, but once he heard a man in the street preach, and the man had said, that if people were good, they would go to a beautiful place called heaven, and be dressed in white robes, and have wings, and they should sing all day long, and they should have everything that they wanted. Now Nat thought, 'I should like three whole herrings at a time, and a large new box of matches.' As to singing, Nat had heard the woman and her children who lived in the same room with them sing, but he did not think much of it, and he did not think that he should care to sing all day long. However, though Nat did not like singing, he did try to be good; he never told stories, nor did he ever pick the crust off the penny roll in the morning when he went to fetch it, as some other boys did.

Nat and his mother walked quickly through the streets this December night. Nat's mother had to

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carry a large bundle of clothes, and Nat held on by her skirt, and I think his poor mother had to drag him a little too; but she was a very good-natured woman, and she told him to trot along faster, with a smile on her brown face. Nat was very pleased with his walk; he had never been in that part before, and the gas and the pretty things in the shops quite excited him, and he actually began to think of the other things he should want in heaven besides the three herrings and the match-box. Whilst he was settling these wants in his little head, his mother stopped at a big house, with lights in all the windows, and a carriage standing in front of the door. Nat's mother rang the bell, and went down the area steps, telling Nat to stand by the railings till she came back again. Nat did so, and in the next chapter you shall hear what he saw whilst he stood there.

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CHAPTER II.

NAT, when his mother had gone down the steps of the house in Russell Square, leant against the rails, and admired the splendid fan-light over the door. While he was doing this, the door opened sharply, and a white-headed footman came out and opened the door of a carriage standing in the road, and then, before Nat had time to open his eyes any wider, two beautiful figures passed into the carriage. They were dressed all in white, and one of them, the tallest, had a pale face, and soft dark eyes, and a bright wreath resting on her brown hair; the other one was quite small, not much bigger than Nat, and she had rosy cheeks, and long golden curls falling down to her waist. Both wore white

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cloaks with bright, little, red silk hoods. They stepped into the carriage, and the footman shut the door, and Nat soon had only the fan-light to look at again. He did not care for it now, he leant back against the railings feeling quite frightened. 'They were angels,' he whispered to himself, 'and they had wings under those white cloaks, and they wore those white cloaks to keep their wings clean. I wonder if they have all they want.'

Nat's mother now came up the steps; but Nat could not find words to tell what he had seen, only when they had passed the light streets, and reached their own dark house again, he said half in a whisper, 'Mother, I've seen some angels.' His mother did not hear him. Nat did not say any more, but he crept under the old blanket and lay quite still for a long time, thinking of what he had seen. The next day, too, he did not forget it, but finding a match in the Jew's corner, he lit it, and then, letting it burn till it was charred, he drew two angels on the whitewashed wall. I do not think that we should have fancied them like angels had we seen

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these pictures, but they reminded Nat of his beautiful vision, and he cried for a long time when the two little boys who slept in the other corner laughed at them, and rubbed them out with their coat sleeves.

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CHAPTER III.

ABOUT a week after Nat's walk, the weather turned very cold and foggy, and one afternoon Nat, who had wandered a little way from his home, found himself quite at a loss to get back again. He could not see across the roads, and the streets were so slippery with a late frost that he could not help falling down very often. However, Nat was a clever lad, and he reached home at last—in fact, finding it difficult to walk, he crawled on his hands and knees. You know he had not smart knicker-bockers or pretty worked trousers, so it did not matter as much as if you had crawled along the pavement. When Nat found the house, he was

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going upstairs at once, when a woman ran out from the parlours, and holding him tight by the arms, said:

'Ye can't go upstairs, child; best stay here with me,'

Now Nat had heard dreadful tales of this woman, how she drank, and how she beat her own children, and he did not know what would become of him if he stayed with her in her dismal room, so he kicked with all his might, and wriggled out of her clutch like a little eel. She laughed, but did not try to follow him as he rushed upstairs and banged against the door, thinking she was at his heels. The door flew open, but Nat did not move further in; he stood with his lips wide apart, and his eyes staring, for on the matress lay his mother, with a cloth bound round her head, her eyes shut, and her face ghastly. A tall man in black stood by her, feeling her wrist, and a little stout man, in pepper and salt, was speaking to him. The woman who lived in the same room was looking with curiosity on the three, and when

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Nat opened the door so noisily she turned to the men, and said:

'That there's her child, sirs.'

'Come here quietly, little one,' spoke the tall man. 'Your poor mother fell down, and has hurt herself very much, so you must be very still.'

Nat drew near the bed, and kneeling on the floor put his face close by his mother's. She seemed to feel and know his warm breath, for she tried to move her hand, as if to caress him. Poor woman, she could not do it, and a tear fell through the shut eyelids. Then she seemed to shudder, her breathing ceased, and the little man in a low voice said—

'She's gone, sir.'

Nat did not understand what the man meant, but he crept closer to his mother, and sobbed piteously. The man in black was a clergyman, and a kind man, and he tried to take Nat from off the mattress, but Nat screamed, and would not listen to the soothing words.

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'Your mother's dead,' the little man croaked in a gruff voice.

Nat looked up wonderingly.

'Dead? Then is she going to heaven?' he asked the clergyman.

The clergyman did not know what to answer. He hesitated, and Nat went on:

'I don't mind if she is going to heaven, for then she will be an angel, and have everything she wants, and she will want me.'

The clergyman stared.

'Is,' he said, turning to the woman, 'is the child right, quite right, here?' and he pointed to his forehead,

'Lor, sir, he's always going on like that about angels and them things.'

'Well, well,' the little man interrupted; 'my good woman, you take charge of the boy until to-morrow morning, when I will send about the inquest, and the child shall be taken to the house.'

Then the two left the room, and Nat crept under the blanket, and tried to warm his mother

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with his own little warm hands. The woman grinned as she looked at him.

'It's few as would sleep with a dead body any way,' she said.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE next morning a man came to take Nat to the workhouse. At first he would not go, but they told him he should soon see his mother again, if he went quietly like a good lad. So he took hold of the man's hand, and with a tearful look left the room.

The days passed heavily with Nat in that big brown house; for though he had lots of companions, he did not care for any of them, and only waited for his mother. He had a new suit of clothes, but they were rough, and he felt stiff in them, and would have much rather kept on his old ones. He had plenty to eat, and the people were not unkind to him; but still he felt restless. He could think only of his mother, and that she was coming to fetch him.

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A fortnight passed, and still Nat waited. One afternoon, when the workhouse boys were playing in the yard, and running about to keep themselves warm—for the weather was bitterly cold and dull, though the sun tried with all its might to force its way through the clouds and brighten the poor little fellows—Nat found a means to escape. There was a violent pull at the yard bell, and the porter bustled to open the gate; and when he saw a carriage standing outside, and a portly dignified clergyman get out of it and enter the yard, he was so taken by surprise that he forgot to shut the gate again. He followed the visitor up to the house, and left the way out clear for Nat. Nat did not take long to consider, but sidled along to it, keeping close to the wall, for fear the other boys should see him, and at last he reached it, and then he ran off as fast as his legs could carry him. He knew the streets pretty well, and soon found the old house where he used to live. He did not go in; he only went there as a starting-point for the big house where his angels lived. He thought

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if he only found that, and could see the angels again, he would ask them to take him to heaven with them, and then he should see his mother. Off he flew again, and in a few minutes was panting against the railings of the big house.

It was dusk, and the lights were not lit yet, or the blinds pulled down, and Nat could see the bright fire, and the servants moving about the room and laying the dinner-cloth.

Presently a footman came into the room carrying glasses, and the two servants chatted together, and then the girl came to the window, and saw Nat staring in with his big eyes. She shook her head at him crossly, and said something to the footman, so he came to the window and closed the shutters, scowling at poor little Nat all the while, so Nat's bright picture was gone, and he could only look at the fan-light over the door, and wonder how long it would be before the angels came.

Soon the lamplighter passed, and Nat watched him light all the lamps in the square, and felt quite lonely when the last one was lit, and the man went

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away. Then the dark seemed to come in a bustle, as if it were ashamed to let the lamps burn for nothing, and then the square seemed gradually to get quiet and empty, and then Nat sat on the door-steps, and felt very cold and unhappy. An hour passed away, and he had nearly fallen asleep, when he was roused by heavy carriage-wheels rolling up to the door. He jumped up off the steps, and, his heart failing him, he stooped down by the railings again as much out of sight as he could.

The footman got off the box and rang the bell. The door was opened, and Nat heard the servant say, 'They will be ready directly.' Then the footman went and stood by the carriage-door, and Nat shook with fear that he should be seen, and be sent away before the angels came. However, the footman was too busy flapping his arms and warming himself to take any notice of the little bundle by the railings; and so Nat kept his corner, and stared at the street-door, so as to be ready the first moment it opened. At last he heard steps in the

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hall, a hand on the latch, and the door springs back, and now Nat jumps up in readiness to make his petition. A chill of disappointment creeps over him—his angels are not there, it is only a stout, white-haired, old gentleman, who gets into the carriage slowly; but Nat looks again,—yes, his angels are coming; they are in the hall with some little boys. The little boys come first, but Nat could hardly look at them, he was so eager to see the white angels again. They come slowly, the tall one first, looking so beautiful to-night, and with such a kind smile on her face; and then, following her, Nat sees the lovely little one with the golden hair. She stepped into the carriage, and the footman was just closing the door, when Nat sprang forward, crying,—

'Take me, take me too. I do so—I must go to heaven, my mother is there! Oh, pray, pray, take me too!

The old gentleman leaned forward. 'Hallo, what's there? Well, my lad, what do you want? —a penny?'

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'No, no, take me with you pray!' and here Nat broke down, and sobbed with excitement.

'What an odd child!' the lady said.

'Suppose he goes with John on the box, my dear? He can do no harm, and perhaps the lad has never seen a play in his life,' answered the old gentleman.

'Oh! do let him grandpapa, do, please,' cried the little girl.

Nat could not speak for joy: he thought he was safe now the little angel wished him to go; but his heart sank again when the footman shut the door with a bang. The coachman raised his whip. 'Stop,' said a voice from inside; 'take that child up with you John, he can sit beside you, and you can take him in with you.' Nat did not wait to be twice told, but he climbed up the box, and tried to make himself as small as he could on the seat. John followed, grumbling at being obliged to sit by a workhouse boy; and the carriage drove to Covent Garden Theatre.

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CHAPTER V.

WHEN the carriage stopped, Nat scrambled off the box after the footman as fast as he could, so us to be sure to follow the angels. They got out, and were entering the portico with Nat close behind them, when John caught him by the arm. 'I say young man, you're not going in there. A pretty joke. You're to come with me.' And Nat, glad to get in anywhere, followed him. They went in by the pit entrance, and as they were late could only get back seats. Nat was perched up between the footman and a fat old lady with a big basket, and he was five minutes before he could make out what had become of himself. Then, gradually

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getting used to the music and lights, he looked about him for his mother and the angels. The angels he saw high above him, in a pretty frame of yellow satin, and he saw, too, in other frames, other angels as beautiful as his old friends, but his mother he looked for in vain.

Before the pantomime began there was a short operetta, which of course, Nat could not understand, but he liked to see the grand dresses and the scenery, and he liked the music, too, very much. But when the patomime began, and the fairies in golden dresses and real wings came on the stage, then Nat's delight was too great to be enjoyment. It is of no use telling you about the pantomime, or about what Nat thought of it. Those little boys and girls who have seen one must try and remember what they thought of the first pantomime they went to; and those little boys and girls who have not seen one must think of Nat the first time that they do, and then they can guess nearly how he felt. He did not care so much for the harlequinade; indeed it made him quite unhappy to see the poor

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pantaloon treated so badly, and at last the noise and heat made him so tired that he fell fast asleep.

When the pantomime was over, every one bustled to get out first, the old woman going one way through the forms, and the footman in haste to get the carriage ready for his master hurried off the other, so Nat was left alone nodding on his high seat. He did not wake until a hard hand touched his shoulder, and a gruff voice said, 'What are you doing here, youngster?' Nat started up frightened, and still half asleep, and the hand took him by the collar and marched him out of the theatre, closing the heavy door with a bang behind him. This bang awoke Nat, he rubbed his eyes, and felt as if he had had a beautiful dream and a very disagreeable waking; then, not knowing where to go, he coiled himself up in a bundle and laid himself under the portico, and was soon fast asleep again.

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CHAPTER VI.

MORNING came, and Nat woke up very cold and stiff and hungry. His first thought was of the angels. Last night seemed to him like a fairy tale, though he did not know that himself, for he had never read fairy tales. He remembered distinctly the wonderful things he had seen, but he could not recall the end of the evening. He had been in heaven, and he woke up and found himself in the cold streets. Then, as to what he should do: why, he would go to the big house again, and see if the angels had gone back, and whether they could take him with them once more, and he thought to himself, 'If they do, I'll not come out again so quickly.' He reached the big house before

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'Come in, little boy,' said a kind voice; and Nat stood on the Turkey carpet of the large dining-room.—BLIND MERCY, p. 125.

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the shutters were opened, so he could only take his old place by the railings, and wait. An hour passed away before the blinds were raised, and another hour before the master of the house came down to breakfast. When he did, he walked to the window to see what kind of morning it was, and started to see Nat's white face and big eyes peering at him through the railings. He turned round and spoke to some one in the room. The lady, Nat's tall angel, came to the window. They spoke together, and the gentleman tapped on the glass; presently the street door opened, and the footman called to Nat, 'You'll catch it, you little scamp! I say, my lad, the master wants to see you.' Nat went in, and did not feel very frightened, for was not the tall angel there, and were not angels always good?

'Come in, little boy,' said a kind voice; and Nat stood on the Turkey carpet of the large dining-room.

'Are you the little boy that went to the pantomime last night?'

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'Please, sir, I went with you to heaven last night?'

'Did what—went to heaven?'

'Yes, sir, and saw the angels, but mother was not there.'

'Who is your mother? Where do you live? Are you not a workhouse boy?'

Nat did not know which question to answer first, and the lady whispered, 'Perhaps his mother is engaged at the theatre.'

'Ah,' said the old gentleman. 'Is your mother one of the fairies?'

'No, please, sir, mother went very pale, and did not talk, and had blood all down her face, and the gentleman told me perhaps she would go to heaven and be an angel.'

'And what then, child? Why did you want to go with us last night?'

Oh, sir, I thought this beautiful lady and the other one would take me with them to mother.'

'The child has had a lot of nonsense talked to him,' said the old gentleman.

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'His mother's dead, poor little fellow,' said the lady.

'Suppose he goes into the kitchen, and has some breakfast?' proposed the master: 'and afterwards we will see what we can do for him.'

So Nat was taken into the kitchen, and then the kind lady had a long talk with him, and nearly understood all his fancies, and then the old gentleman asked him if he would like to go into the country and learn to be a gardener.

'I'd like to go anywhere with you and the angels,' said Nat, not understanding what the 'country' meant.

And Nat was taken to the country, and saw flowers and fields, and birds and water, and he was always a good boy; so, after a time, the old gentleman paid a visit to the workhouse, and he told the master what had become of little Nat, and he said,—

'I will take care of him and educate him, for the child has quite won all our hearts.'

And this is the end of Nat's story.

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LUCY'S DREAM.

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LUCY'S DREAM.

LUCY lived in a large house in the country. Of course, you have all been in the country. I do not mean a month spent at Brighton, or at Hastings, in the hot summer months, where the houses are all as proud and stuck-up as those in London, and where, instead of roaming about yellow buttercup fields and woody lanes, you are dried up on scorching brown sand. No, you will not know the kind of house that Lucy lived in, unless you have been in one of our beautiful midland counties, and then perhaps you have even seen the very house. It is

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built of red bricks, and has a great number of tall peaked windows in it. It was built so very long ago, that the bricks in front of the windows are now discoloured, and look as if the poor windows had been weeping at being obliged to stare at the same melancholy trees for so many years. But in summer time virginia-creepers and jasmine climb up the walls and hug the bricks so closely that they wipe the tears away, or, at least, do not let any one see them.

Perhaps you would rather hear about Lucy than about her house. Well, she had no brothers or sisters, and no mamma, only a very kind papa and a governess to take care of her. Her papa was out all day; and in the evening he used to take little Lucy on his knee, and hear all that she had been doing in the day-time.

One evening Lucy was very tired, and was glad to nestle in her papa's arms. Whilst he was smoking his cigar, she lay back and watched, with a serious face, the long rings of smoke that twisted round and round.

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'Papa, where do you get cigars from?'

'What, does not my little Lucy know; has not Miss Cram taught you that?'

'No; I don't believe Miss Cram knows anything about it. She can never remember that my best doll-child is Solferina and not Dolly. Tell me, please, papa.'

Then her papa told her that the tobacco was brought all the way from Cuba, and that it was a high plant, with long yellowish green leaves, and that it was dried and rolled up; and he told her, too, about the noble Sir Walter Raleigh, who first brought it over for Englishmen to smoke. Before he had quite finished his tale, little Lucy was fast asleep, and in a fairy land of her own. She thought that she was in a thick forest of these plants with the long waving leaves, and that, dancing amongst them and under them, she saw a number of little elves in gauzy floating yellow dresses. These elves were singing and skipping, and seemed very happy, when all at once they stopped their play and listened. They heard a heavy step, and peeped be-

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tween the leaves on all sides; next they wrung their hands as if in terror; and then one of them, a sharp-looking little elf, broke off a long leaf from the nearest plant, and throwing himself on the ground, turned over and over until he was quite rolled up in it. The other elves did not at first quite understand what he was up to; but as the capital idea struck them, they clapt their hands, and plucking the longest leaves, followed his example. Soon, instead of a beautiful waving green palace, there were only thick brown stalks looking like monuments up at the sky, while the ground was covered with yellow little pillows. The step drew nearer, and presently a tall man stood where the little elves had been dancing. He was dressed in bright coloured satin and velvet, and looked so handsome, frank, and kind, that had the elves but waited to look at him, they could not then have been so silly as to hide themselves. He stared around amazed at the desolation of the place, and touched curiously with his foot some of the little round balls on the ground. At last he sat down on a bank near, and

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then just at his foot saw one poor little elf weeping bitterly.

'Oh, my poor friends, my poor friends!' he cried.

'Why, who art thou, sprite?' said the tall man.

'I am but an unhappy little elf who has lost all his comrades.'

'Poor little fellow, stay thy tears, and it shall all be well with them. Your foolish little playmates thought that I was worse than I am, and have hidden themselves in those poisonous leaves; nay, do not touch them, or you may be poisoned too.'

'What, my friends all dead!' sobbed the elf.

'Not so; not quite so bad as that.'

Here the tall man picked up one of the rolls, and Lucy looking on the ground saw that all the leaves had turned a dark brown for they had withered after being plucked, and the sun had dried them. When Lucy looked up again, instead of the tall man, she saw Miss Cram, in her stone-coloured silk, with her cork-screw curls and white

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lappets, whilst with her black-mittened hands she held a brown roll to her mouth, and puffed away as if she had been used to smoking all her life.

'Now, attention,' said Miss Cram to the little elf; 'observe your comrades rising.'

At these words there could be seen through the whiffs of smoke the thin, vapoury figures of the elves, as they twisted and turned round and round, and at last disappeared.

'They will fly to a place of safety now,' she said, 'but I must persuade my friends to help me, for I cannot liberate all these foolish animalculæ by myself.'

'But don't you think other big people might perhaps hurt my dear, dear brothers?' asked the elf.

'No, for none shall perceive them, but those who are blessed by the fairies.

'Thanks, thanks,' said the little elf, and before Miss Cram could stop him, he too had plucked a yellow leaf, and throwing himself down, rolled

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himself round and round in it, impatient to be smoked away, for he longed so much to join his little friends.

'Lucy, Lucy, is it not time for Bedfordshire?'

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About Philip.

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ABOUT PHILIP.

IT was a hot sultry evening in August, when Philip stood by the open window of his bed-room, leaning out, and thinking before he went to bed. The house that Philip lived in was in one of the large quiet squares of London. It was not far from a noisy road, but the square seemed always still, and its trees and quiet were very pleasant after the noise and bustle of the great city. Philip's room was at the top of the house, and looked over a small yard at the back, where stood two aspen poplar trees, whose leaves were always chattering to one another about what they heard and saw in the great world outside, for their topmost branches peeped over

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some stables, and could also stare into many of the neighbouring house-windows. I do not know exactly why these trees grew there: it was certainly not for their beauty's sake, because they were only green a fortnight in the year, and the rest of the time, out of compliment to the houses round about, put on their neighbours' dingy uniform. Perhaps they stood there to keep the sun off Philip's mamma's drawing-room curtains; or there is another reason which I have just thought of, perhaps they grew up so that they might be a Kew Gardens or a Bushey Park for the little black sparrows that hopped about there. Poor little things! they sorely needed a change from the red chimney-pots and sooty house-roofs: and on a hot night like this they must have found the cool branches very refreshing though the leaves were such noisy gossips.

Philip stood moodily at the window, with his elbows on the sill, and his eyes looking far away over the tree-tops. Instead of going to bed this night happily and full of fun, as he usually did, the poor boy was heavy and sad, for he felt, for the

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first time in his life, lonely. Perhaps, when I tell you the cause of this feeling of loneliness, you will think that he was very foolish, and that he ought not to have given way to it. You will be quite right in so thinking; but then we all are foolish and give way sometimes, and so you must not be too hard upon our friend Philip.

Philip was one brother amongst many sisters—they therefore thought him the noblest and bravest brother that had ever been: and Philip really was a brave and noble boy, for though he may not have had all the good virtues that his sisters gave to him, he certainly had some which his sisters knew nothing about. For the last three months the family had been anxiously expecting the coming home of a sailor uncle. The children had not seen him since they were very small, the youngest having been even a baby; and so perhaps you can imagine how much they were all thinking about the tales that they expected uncle Kit would tell them. They were looking forward to them with too great a pleasure, for it would have been impossible unless

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he had had as many voyages as Sindbad the Sailor, or seen and done as many marvellous things as Sindbad the Sailor saw and did, for him at all to have satisfied their dreams of his adventures. Thus, when he did come home, the children drew away from him, and spoke in a disappointed tone, for, instead of the talkative, brigand-looking uncle they had expected, they saw a tall, thin man, with a square serious face, and eyes so deep in his head, that they were not quite sure, at first, if he had eyes at all; and even when little Bessie did find them, by their twinkling, it struck her that they were a great deal too small for them ever to have seen much. They were disappointed, too, at his dress not being at all strange, for he had not even gilt buttons, but might, as Philip said, 'by the look of his hands and coat, have done nothing but walk down Regent Street all his life.' However, after a time, the children got used to their disappointment, and then gradually got used to their uncle. He began to tell them tales, too, about people and places he had seen; not such wonderful tales as

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they had longed for, but still very amusing ones. But he seemed to like best to have one little girl on his knee, and the others standing around him, and then to hear about their work and their music, and about what they did all the day-time. He did not take so much notice of Philip, and Philip heard him say that he feared 'the boy would be quite spoilt by being brought up with so many girls.' This rather hurt Philip's feelings, for he had always thought himself a very manly boy; and though he did speak gently to his sisters, and kindly mend their dolls and their workboxes, he knew himself that he would much rather have a game of cricket with other boys than be a dolls' doctor or girls' carpenter. His uncle, too, had once or twice called him lazy, and had said that before he was Philip's age he had been half round the world, and that he never had more than three hours' sleep at a time. It struck Philip as rather hard that he should be reproached because he had not run away from school (as his uncle had done), but had kept steadily at his lessons instead; while, as for sleeping so much,

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why, he never wanted to go to bed when he was told, and only went because he did not like to worry his mother to let him stay up later. When he was in bed, to be sure, he might wake up every three hours; but, if he did, he did not see what good it would do: so Philip, and I think justly, fancied his uncle was not quite fair with him.

This evening, as it had been very hot all day, and the cooler air now was so refreshing, the children had been allowed to stay up later, and they were gathered round their mamma and uncle, telling their good and bad deeds of the day, before they went to bed. Ruth confessed to have been very cross over her music, particularly, when she had to play the scale of G with six flats. Fanny remembered having cried, though she could not exactly recollect why; and then uncle Kit turned to Philip, 'And what, sir, have you done to-day?'

'I don't remember to have done anything in particular,' answered Philip, his uncle's abrupt question putting all his deeds, both good and bad, out of his head.

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'I would much rather hear,' said uncle Kit, 'that you had been in mischief than that you had done nothing in particular.'

'Yesterday I broke mamma's best glass dish, and spilt all the custard,' returned Philip.

'Glorious achievement!' said uncle Kit drily, while mamma could not help smiling, and the little girls laughed loudly. Philip looked fierce; and then his sisters, who really loved him very much, were sorry that he should be so vexed, and tried to be grave again, whilst Ruth, his pet sister, pushed up to him and squeezed her little hand through his shut fingers.

There was a silence for a few minutes; then, uncle Kit, breaking the stillness, said, 'I will tell you a tale. And the tale which he told, Philip was still thinking about, as he leant moodily on the window-sill. It was a very short one, and, as uncle Kit said, was not to be believed for a moment. He said, too, looking at Philip, he only told it to them for the sake of the moral.

It was about a boy named David, who had been

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shipwrecked, and who had been the only one saved from a crew of thirty hands. It had been a fearful night for this boy David, for the storm had come on in the darkness, and increased so quickly, and with so much fury, that the captain and men soon saw that a miracle alone could save their little craft. The boats were not seaworthy, or the crew were too frightened to use them, and David saw the men, as a great fear came upon them, jump overboard, and thus seek themselves the very death they were dreading. He himself was too frightened at the white foam and the angry growling of the waves to follow them, but he knelt quite still, grasping the mast, while his limbs felt as if they were bound with iron chains, so impossible it seemed for him to rise, or to let go his hold. Hours passed—hours so long and dreary; but at last day broke, and gradually, as it grew lighter, the sea became calmer. David raised himself, looked about, and then shut his eyes with a shudder; for he, the weakest of the crew, was alone,—alone, on that black-looking sea. Alone in a black-looking world

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he might have thought; for as he looked round, the clouds on every side seemed joined to the sea, and the small storm-stripped wreck he was on appeared the centre of a dismal globe. Then uncle Kit told them how miserably David passed several days in his prison, the ship, and that one morning he discovered in the S.W. horizon a green line which he at once recognised as land. Whether the wreck had drifted to it, or it had arisen in the night, David never knew, but it was there on the third morning after the storm. Then David with great joy soon found a plank, and strapping himself to it, managed to paddle to the green line, and found it to be high cliffs, covered with moss and weeds, while great trees grew on the edge, and dipped their branches into the water. The cliffs were so high that David almost gave up the idea of ever getting to the top; however, with the help of the strong weeds and the trees, he did reach it at last, and then he felt very thankful for what he found there. Instead of the wild desert he had expected, there was a beautiful city before him,

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with houses grander than he had seen even in London. It seemed to him that he had climbed up the least inhabited part of the island, for he could see a great number of people moving about among the handsome streets more inland; while near him, though there were some of the largest buildings, he could see no one. He noticed, too that these large buildings, though grandly built, looked very desolate and uncomfortable, and as if no care had been taken with them. He was going to walk on further, when a sight startled him so much that he felt almost inclined to jump back into the sea once more. On the grass outside one of the biggest houses was stretched a man—a giant, perhaps, I ought to say—a giant so long that David thought that there was no end to him. This giant lay quite still, as if asleep, and David wondered if he could get away without being noticed. No, the movement in the grass disturbed him; he raised his head, and in a sleepy voice called out to the sailor-boy. David—for he was really brave—went up to him, and the giant asked him where he came

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from, and who he was. These questions answered, David grew pluckier, put questions too, and at last, in a hesitating tone, asked, 'How long are you?' The giant answered him—I forget the exact length, but it was very long; and he told him, too, many strange things about the island. That the people on it did not die of years, but of deeds, and that to die was looked upon as their one great wish, 'for the life on this island,' said the giant, 'we only count as an apprenticeship, as an entrance to the life afterwards to come.' The giant then, with a great effort, changed his position; and then he told David that some men lived a long life before they were twenty, whilst others, like himself, were mere babies, though really hundreds of years old. Then he said that the hardest part was that, as time went on, without deeds, the men grew taller and taller. 'You will find those that are active small and lithe, and with glossy black hair, while each day that I lie here I grow longer and longer, and my hair, instead of turning white, as I have heard that it does from old age in some countries, turns redder

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and redder.' And the poor giant sighed deeply, while David asked why he did not get up and work, for perhaps he might then either die or grow shorter. The giant answered that that was another hard part of the life on this island, for the longer a man kept idle the more difficult it was for him to work, and that now it had become almost impossible for him even to rise. The people here, he told David, were beginning to think him a public nuisance, and were discussing what they could do with him, for they knew as well as he did how impossible it was for him to exert himself now, and they were wondering how much more room he would take if he went on growing during generation after generation. 'This talk,' he said, 'may do me good. It is a good deed, for I meant to warn you off the island, and I need not have spoken at all, but let you go further inland, and eaten our fruit, and slept in our enchanted air, and then you too would have had to work or grow. Do you think, boy, that my length is less than when you first saw me?'

David did not know what to answer, for though

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he despised the giant, he could not help pitying him, and he did not like to tell him that he could see no difference; so he said nothing, but turned away, and began weeding a large bed of beautiful flowers that grew near. The giant sighed deeply again, and in a more sleepy manner still, beckoned David nearer to him. 'Fly, boy, fly this place.' Then his big eyes closed, and once more every inch of the big giant was sleeping.

Then uncle Kit told how David, after thinking a little with himself, did leave the island,—not that he was lazy, and feared to grow, though after he had got on board the wreck again he did stretch out his arms to see if his coat-sleeves were shorter, —but because the island puzzled him, and his father was a Scotchman and cautious, and David felt sure that he should be more comfortable on his lonely wreck than on an island where there was even a chance of his hair turning red. The rest of uncle Kit's tale was soon told, though of course David had some more strange adventures before he found himself again amongst his own friends.

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It was the first part of the tale that Philip was thinking about this hot August night. His uncle had said that he told the tale for the sake of the moral, and Philip knew that he meant the moral particularly for him, and Philip was wondering if his uncle was right.

I dare say that you have often heard people talk about the hum of the world; but have you ever listened to it? Put your head out of your window some evening, when all close to you is still, and then in the distance, if you live in or near a great city, you will hear a sound, as if all the people in it were speaking to you at once in a whisper. Philip heard this whisper, a whisper of three millions of people,—for, you know, he lived in London,—and it almost seemed to him as a voice inviting him to come too, and with ever so slight a movement of his lips to add to the murmur.

Then this fancy changed into thoughts, and he thought what a grand thing it would be if he could put into his school-satchel (he was now playing

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'Then there was another moment of listening,—and Philip opened his door and began to move slowly downstairs.'—BLIND MERCY, page 135.

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with its lock) a change of clothes, a few pet books, his toy schooner, if the mast would shut in, his writing-case, and a few other odd things, and then if he were to leave home, and soon after write a letter back to them at home, and be able to tell them that he had saved a life, or helped to win a battle, or perhaps been one of the first to discover a new land! Then his thoughts became actions, and Philip did put into his satchel a few clothes. The mast of the schooner would stick out beyond the top of the bag, so the schooner had to be left, and a small tool-box went instead. Then there was another moment of listening at the window, and Philip opened his door, and began to move slowly down-stairs. The stairs would creak so, that he was obliged to stop and take his boots off. He did not like doing this at all, for it made him feel as if he were sneaking, and anything like sneaking went very much against his conscience. However, he had made up his mind to go; so barefooted and slowly he at last reached the bottom of the stairs, and was at the parlour door. Just then he

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heard a jingle of glasses, and knew that it was Mary bringing up the supper-tray; so with a bound he was half-way up the flight again, and then he sat down on the stairs as near as he could to the bottom without being seen. He saw the girl bustling in and out to lay the supper, he heard the clatter of the knives and forks, and, waiting impatiently, he rested his head against the balustrade, determined to stay there until the parlour-door was shut again. But he could not help noticing how cheerful the small supper-party was, and he heard his father's voice speaking,—'Ah, my boy, Philip! my boy, Philip.' Those three words were equal to the humming whisper of the world, the moral of the tale of the enchanted island, the expected glory of the letter home. Those three words made Philip's eyes smart, and made Philip run up-stairs, not creep this time, to unpack his satchel and hurry into bed.

Do not think, though, my dear little friends, that this was the end of Philip's sad feelings, or the end of his longings for great deeds. No, but

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from that evening he understood better the last words of that beautiful verse:

'Let us then be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate,
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour, and *to wait*,'

He learned, also, in after years to labour, and believe me he lived a long life in deeds as well as in years; and, believe me, too, that as he grew older, his hair turned white, not red.

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